Salt

December 2018

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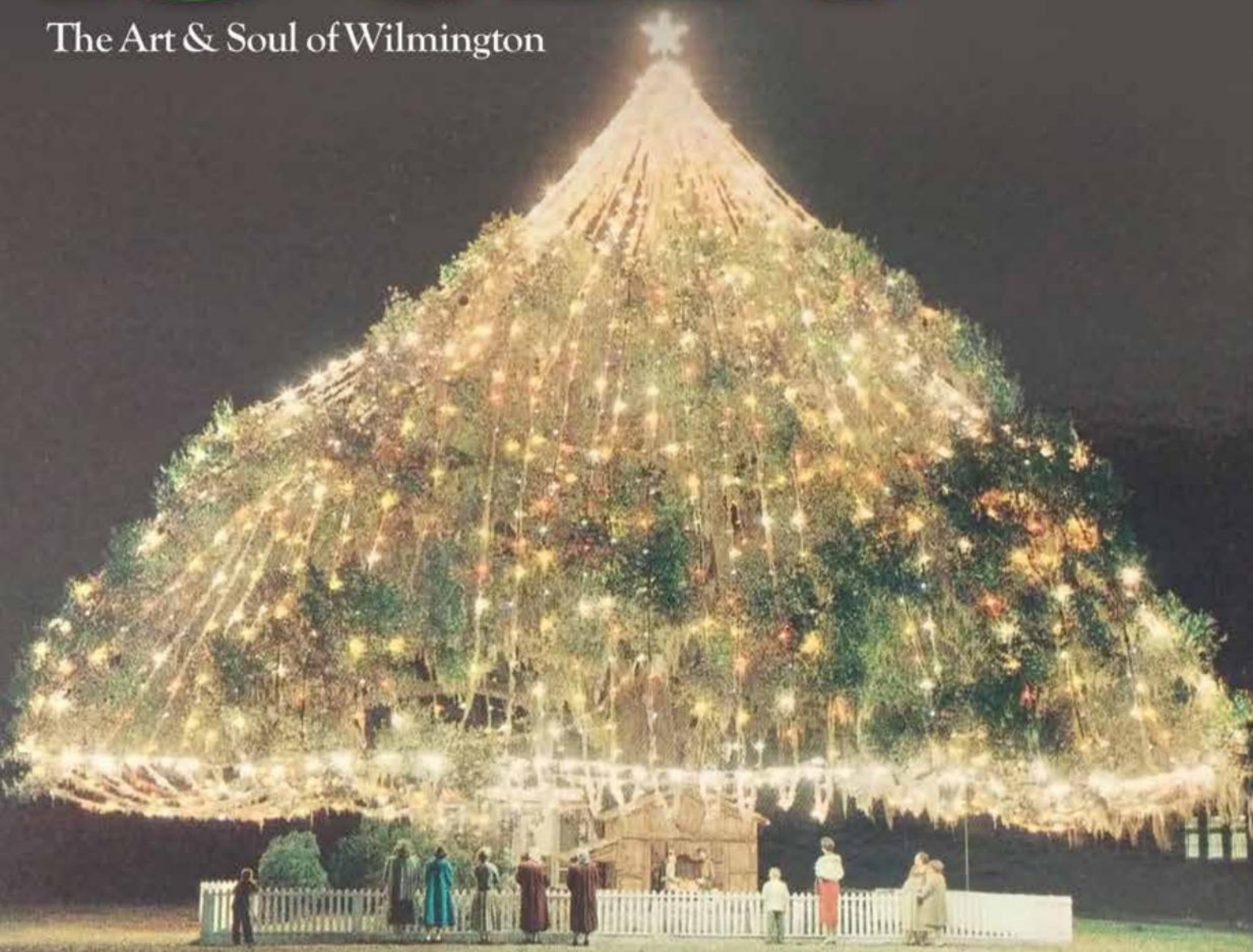

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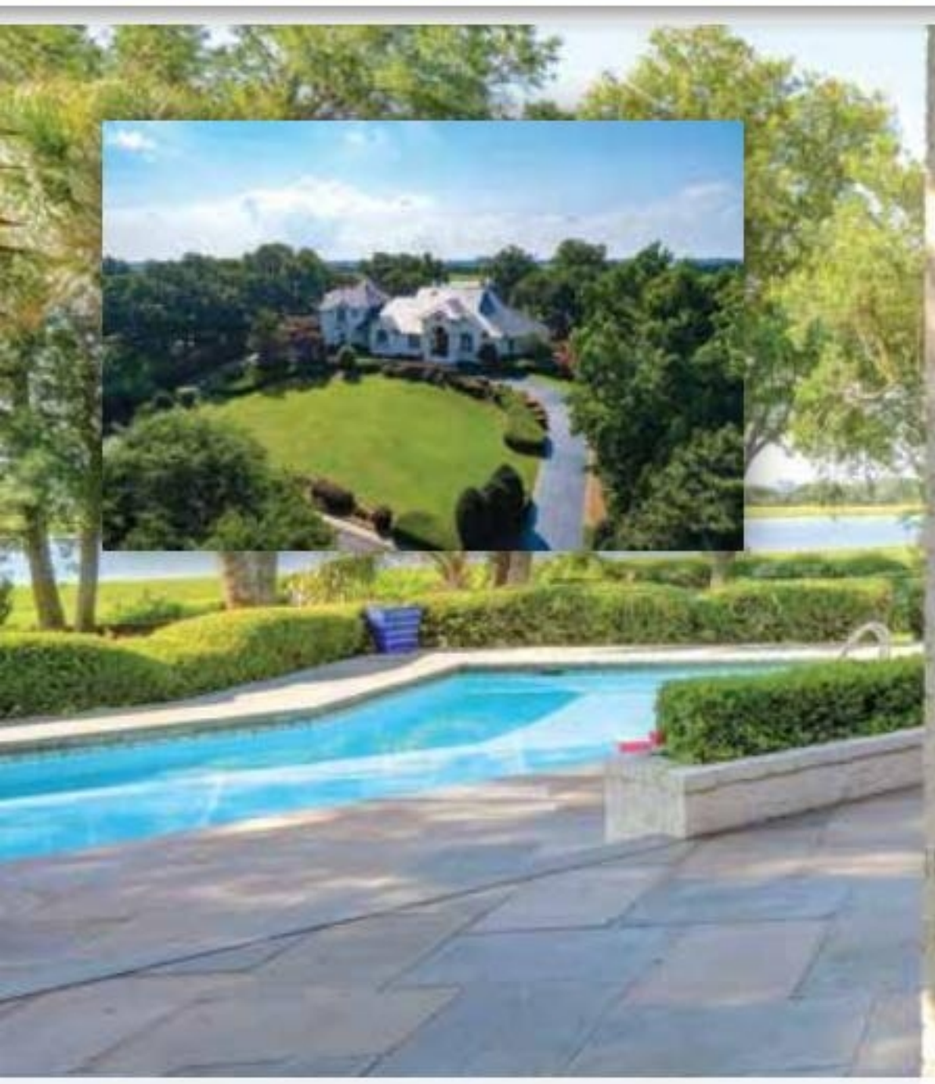

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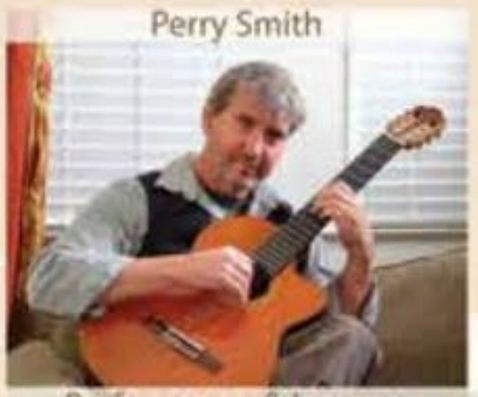
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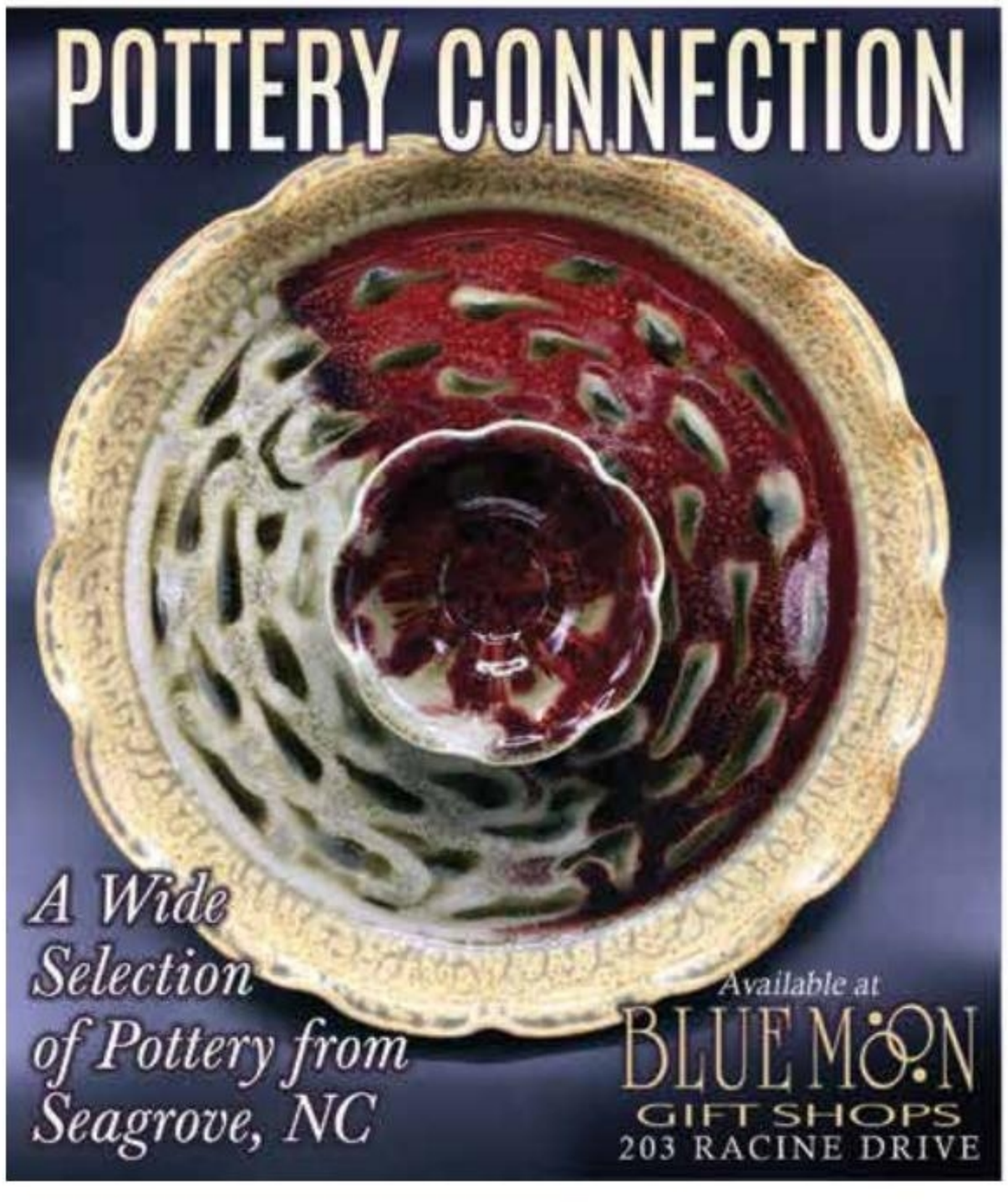
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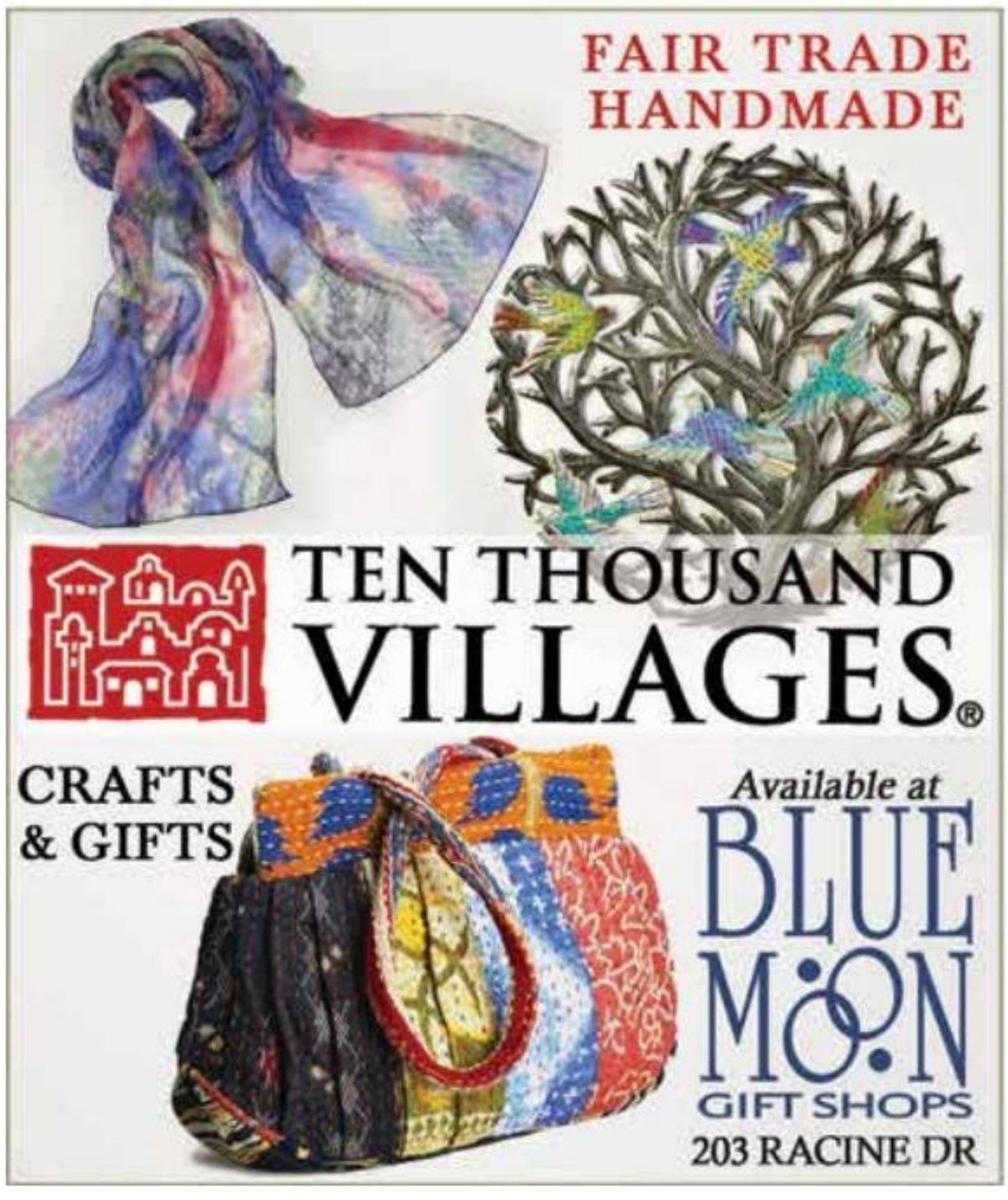
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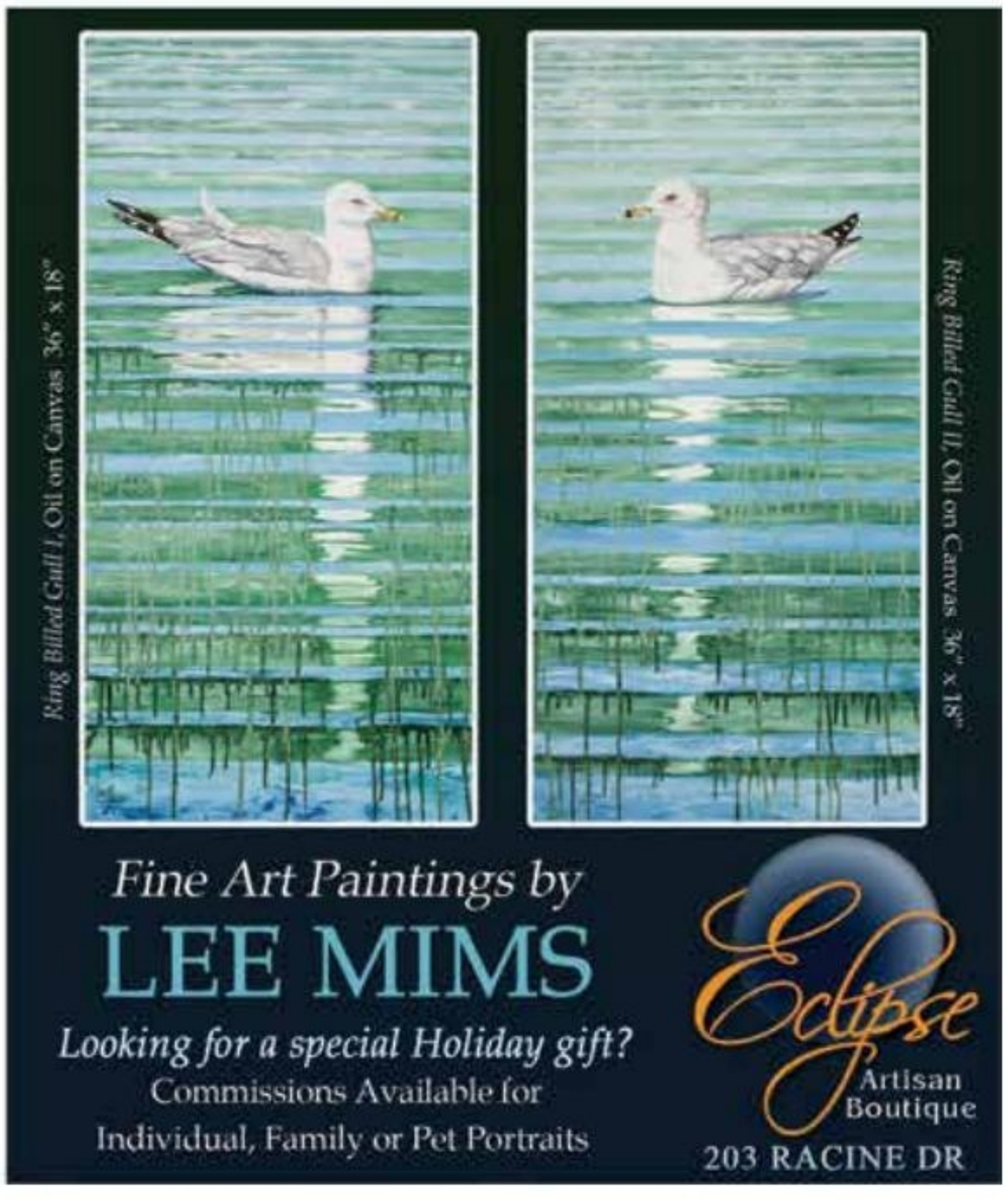
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Silent Nights

Holding infinity in the palms of our hands

By Jim Dodson

When I was a kid, Christmas Eve couldn't get here fast enough, the night I eagerly awaited all year. Mine was a visceral excitement fueled in part by the happy torture of unopened gifts beneath a heavily tinseled fir tree, and the crazy notion that if and when I somehow dropped off to sleep, a jolly bearded housebreaker would enter our premises and leave behind fantastic things I'd coveted from the pages of America's holiest book — the Sears Catalog.

My excitement was also fueled by the other mythic theme of that singular night — the enchantment of a candlelight church service that always ended with congregants passing a small flame hand-to-hand as everyone sang "Silent Night" before filing out into a cold and silent night.

The flickering candles, the mingling scents of burning wax and well-worn hymnals, the ancient readings from Isaiah and St. Luke of a savior babe born in a barnyard stable, the sight of whole families bundled into creaking pews with squirming kids and yawning grandpas, O Magnum Mysterium — somehow it blended together into a delicious stew of magic and wonder that I felt — nay, *believed* — in my very bones. To this day, it's the only time I intentionally stay up past midnight, stepping outside with a wee nightcap of bourbon or aged port to savor what may be the truest of silent nights.

Biblical scholars have long debated (and most disputed) the commonly assigned date of the historical Jesus' birth (neither Luke nor Matthew makes mention of it happening in winter), leaving believers to accept the early Roman Church's artful grafting of the birth of Jesus Christ onto pagan Rome's popular feast of Saturnalia, a major holiday that coincided with the winter solstice that was known for its feasting and gift-giving in celebration of the returning of the sun god, Sol Invictus. For what it's worth, ancient Persians assigned that same day, December 25, to be the birthday of their own returning sun god, Mithra. While in the Hebrew Calendar, the celebration of Hanukkah — the "Festival of Lights" that memorializes the restoration of the Second Temple of Jerusalem following a revolt by the Maccabeans and the miracle of a menorah that burned for eight days — begins on the 25th day of Kislev, which happens to fall anywhere from late November to late December in the Gregorian calendar. Just to make things more interesting, the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church accepts January 7 as the true birth date of Jesus Christ, the proper date of "Old Christmas." Some leading Biblical scholars even maintain that the birthdate of Christ was in March, the start of spring.

Whatever else might be true, the Christmas-loving kid in me has never required a proof-of-authenticity label or even an official "start" date in order to believe in the transformative magic of the holiday season — whether it's the lights of Hanukkah or lovely myth of Father Christmas or even lovelier myth of a virgin birth in a barn.

I embrace the true meaning of the word "myth," by the way, an ancient word that has been stripped of its spiritual power by modern

misuse, originally denoting a traditional story meant to convey an important message, often based on historical events, revealing an important belief, practice or phenomenon — all of which perfectly explains why we human seek the light in whatever form on the longest nights of the year.

Here's my own favorite Christmas story.

During the years we lived on a wooded hill in Maine — deep in a forest of birch and hemlock that almost always had a dusting of snow by Christmas Eve — the Episcopal church we attended put special emphasis on its annual Christmas Eve pageant, an ambitious staging of the Nativity complete with angels, wise men and watchful shepherds guarding their flocks by night.

One year our prodigies, Maggie and Jack, snagged important roles as attending sheep, while my good friend and regular lunch pal, Colonel Robert Day, debuted as the archangel Gabriel. Colonel Bob was an ideal Gabriel, a lovely giant of a gent who'd lost two sons through tragedy and disease but somehow turned his unspeakable grief into counseling families grappling with their own personal tragedies.

In his former life, Bob had been one of the first to lead his unit of army engineers across the Rhine into Nazi Germany during the closing days of the Second World War and was on his way to lead a similar invasion into Japan when the Japanese capitulated. The rest of his military career was spent at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, where he served as admissions director for many years, laying the foundation for the admission of women to the Academy.

Someone kitted out Colonel Bob with a massive pair of papier mâché wings for the pageant, which he sported with the dignity of Laurence Olivier until one wing detached and conked one of the baby cows on the head, bowling over the poor little creature. For a moment, the glory of Jesus' birth was upstaged by anxious gasps as the little cow was righted and Bossie's head removed. Beneath was a laughing kid. The audience broke into spontaneous applause. The kid-cow beamed. "Now *that's* a small miracle," one of the sheep-moms whispered to me with relief. And onward we went to the big finale of gifts from the Magi.

That particular year, the Christmas Eve family service that followed was held at the Settlemeyer family's barn in the hills west of town. The Settlemeyers had real sheep and cows and a horse or two that were undoubtedly amused by the dozens of shivering families that crowded into their freezing barn to light candles and hear about a savior being born on a Midnight Clear. It was my job, as it happened, to provide the musical accompaniment on my guitar, fingers stiff with cold. Fortunately Colonel Bob showed up with a flask of good Irish whiskey. As a live chorus of sheep bleated, I plucked out a respectable "First Noel" followed by "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing!" and "Silent Night" as candlelight passed from hand to hand, illuminating one face at a time.

Up to that moment, worth noting, it had been a snowless winter in Maine — always an anxious thing for the locals (and yours truly) who counted on decent snows to insulate their foundations and garden beds and provide a pristine landscape for their favorite wintertime activities.

But as we blew out candles and stepped out of the Settlemeyers' barn, a second small miracle took place — or maybe just good theatrical timing by the universe.

"Look, everybody," someone cried, "it's *snowing*!"

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Indeed it was — a curtain of beautiful silent snow falling like an answered prayer over the darkened landscape. During the short drive home, my ever-wise lamb of a daughter wondered if the sudden appearance of snow might really be a miracle.

"Absolutely," I assured her with the faith of a mustard seed, recalling Albert Einstein's quote that there are two ways to live your life — as if there's no such thing as miracles, or that everything is a miracle.

For the record, a third miracle occurred that silent night, one involving her proud papa and brilliant Scottish grandmother, Kate, a professed agnostic who cried once when I took her to Evensong at King's College in Cambridge. I nicknamed her our "Queen Mum." Together, we managed to put together a German dollhouse that looked more like a Rhine river castle and came in 4,000 pieces with a dozen pages of instructions in medieval German. In truth, I abandoned the quest around 2 a.m. leaving Mum to her third pot of tea, the rest of the Drambuie and a dying fire. I was certain the task was beyond us both.

In the morning, however, Maggie's dollhouse looked worthy of a Fifth Avenue toy shop window.

"How'd you do that?" I discreetly quizzed the Queen Mum.

"The power of faith, James," she came back with a prim smile. "And good Scottish tea."

Sadly, I think the town fire marshal may have put the kibosh on any more Christmas candlelight services in a livestock barn, that old spoilsport. But I carry the sweetest memories of many such Silent Nights in my heart, that one above the rest.

Like Einstein, you see, I've come to believe everything is a small miracle — the oil that lighted lamps for eight days, a prince of peace born in a freezing stable, an angel with a broken wing who mended broken hearts, an agnostic's tears and people of every race and creed who gather on the darkest night to celebrate the return of the light.

Besides, as Mother Theresa reportedly pointed out, nothing is small to God — only infinite.

Contact Editor Jim Dodson at jim@thepilot.com.

From our family to yours, we give thanks for many blessings this holiday season.

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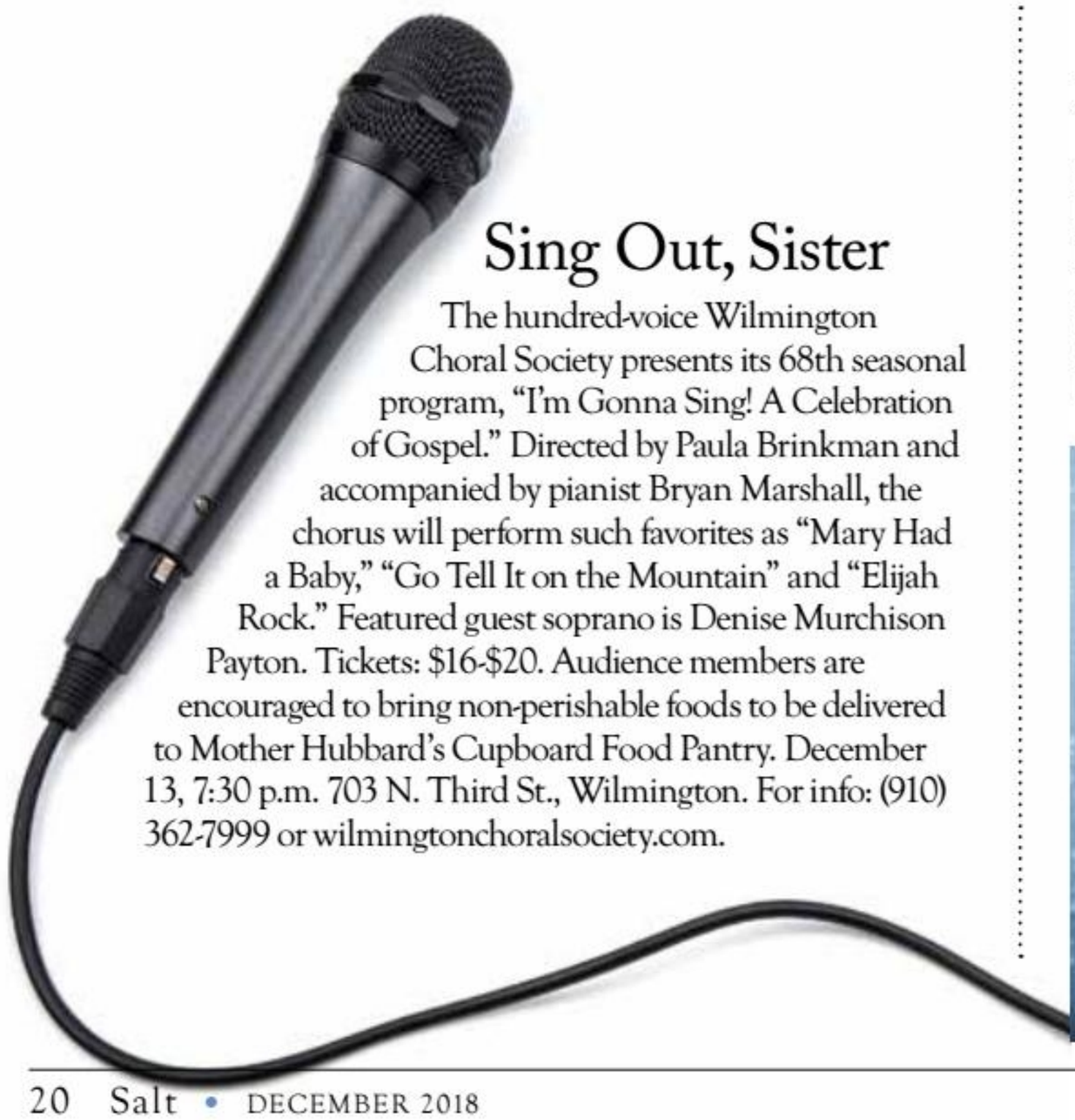
Old Wilmington by Candlelight

The Lower Cape Fear Historical Society will host its 46th annual Old Wilmington by Candlelight Tour, which this year will feature seven historic houses and three churches, among them the Mitchell-Anderson House (1738), the oldest house in Wilmington, which has recently been restored. The tour will also visit Chestnut Presbyterian Church (1858), Shiloh Baptist Church (1870), and St. Mark's Episcopal Church (1871), highlighting the rich architectural and religious heritage of the city's African-American community. Tickets: $40. December 1, 4 - 8 p.m.; December 2, 1-5 p.m. Latimer House, 126 S. Third St., Wilmington. For info: (910)762-0492 or lcfhs.org.



Sing Out, Sister

The hundred-voice Wilmington Choral Society presents its 68th seasonal program, "I'm Gonna Sing! A Celebration of Gospel." Directed by Paula Brinkman and accompanied by pianist Bryan Marshall, the chorus will perform such favorites as "Mary Had a Baby," "Go Tell It on the Mountain" and "Elijah Rock." Featured guest soprano is Denise Murchison Payton. Tickets: $16-$20. Audience members are encouraged to bring non-perishable foods to be delivered to Mother Hubbard's Cupboard Food Pantry. December 13, 7:30 p.m. 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. For info: (910) 362-7999 or wilmingtonchoralsociety.com.

A Festive Forest

The Lower Cape Fear Hospice presents the Cape Fear Festival of Trees, hosted by the North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher. A winter woodland of Christmas trees decorated by local businesses, organizatons and artists graces the halls of the aquarium to create a spectacular holiday forest. Tickets: $10.95-$12.95. Through January 3, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. 900 Loggerhead Road, Kure Beach. For info: 910-458-8257 or ncaquariums.com.

Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas

Poplar Grove Plantation is the setting for a Merry Little Christmas Festival, featuring 60 arts and crafts vendors, a blazing bonfire for toasting marshmallows, visits with Santa and lawn games, as well as outdoor screenings of classic Christmas movies. The grounds and outbuildings will be open, and there are also candlelight tours of the manor house for an additional fee. Tickets: $5. Dec. 7-9 and 14-16. Various times; see website. Poplar Grove Plantation, 10200 U.S. Highway 17 N., Wilmington. For info: (910) 686-9518 or poplargrove.org.

Vienna Boys Choir

The Vienna Boys Choir has been performing since 1498, when it served as the choir of the Viennese court in the Middle Ages. The group has changed dramatically since the original medieval choir of six boys — this year's singers, led by conductor Manolo Cagnin, features boys from all over the world, from Cambodia to Iceland, and many of the performers have ancestors who were members of the choir. The group will also be featured in a new film, Curt Faudon's *Good Shepherds*, which will have its North American premiere this fall. Tickets: $25-$65. December 20, 7:30 p.m. Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. For info and tickets: 910-362-7999.

Moravian Magic

The Covenant Moravian Church of Wilmington is sponsoring a pop-up shop of Dewey's, the legendary bakery founded in downtown Winston-Salem in 1930. The historic shop is best known for its wafer-thin Moravian cookies and cheese straws, as well as chocolate-dipped cookies in mint, blood orange and salted caramel. The shop is staffed by volunteers from the church, which benefits from a portion of holiday sales. Through December 23, 11 a.m.- 7 p.m.; Sundays noon - 5 p.m. Mayfaire, 980 Inspiration Drive, Wilmington. For info: 910-799-9256.

Dancing Queen

Thalian Hall's legendary New Year's Eve Gala will feature dinner, drinks and a live performance of the Opera House Theatre Company's production of the smash Broadway musical *Mamma Mia!* with the musical numbers of ABBA. Afterward, ring in the new year with karaoke, dancing to a live DJ, and a champagne toast. VIP tickets include seating in the Starlight Room with a private buffet and bar. Tickets: $165-$200. December 31, 7 p.m. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. For info and tickets: (910) 632-2285 or thalianhall.org.

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A Masterpiece that Matters

To Kill a Mockingbird *continues to resonate*

By D.G. Martin

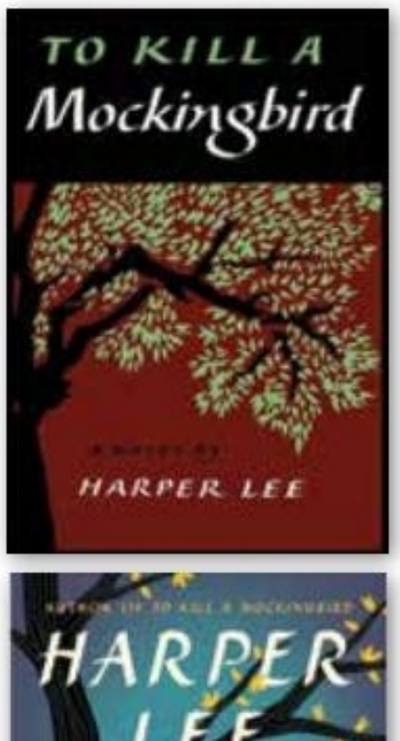
Last October, on the final episode of PBS's The Great American Read, Harper Lee's 1960 Southern classic To Kill a Mockingbird was named "America's Best Loved Novel."

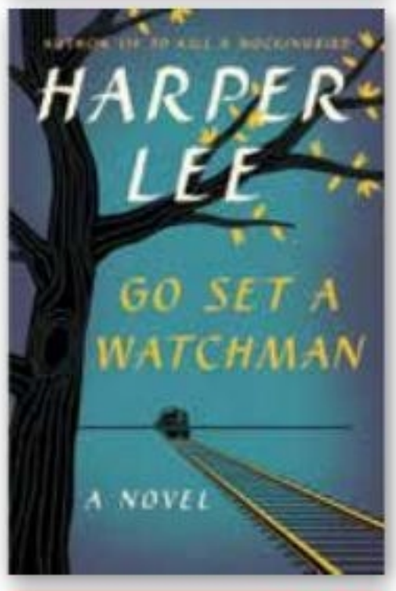
From a list of 100 candidates and a total of 4 million votes cast over several months, *Mockingbird* was a clear winner, receiving 242,275 votes.

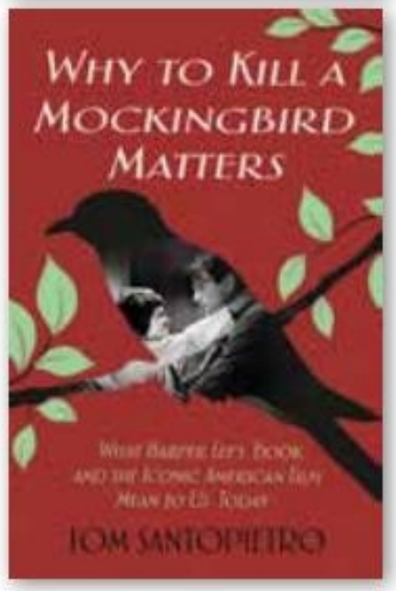
What explains the popularity of *Mockingbird* and its staying power more than a half century after its publication?

The host and leader of the *The Great American Read*, Meredith Vieira, said she was not surprised with the result. "*Mockingbird*," she said, "is a personal favorite of mine — one that truly opened my eyes to a world outside of my own. Harper Lee's iconic work of literature is cherished for its resonance, its life lessons and its impact on one's own moral compass."

Vieira told *USA Today* that she would have picked *Mockingbird* if it had been solely up to her. "I read it when I was 12. Of course it holds up; it's a brilliant novel, and all of the lessons I learned then resonate deeply now. I think the reason I picked it is because I read it at a pivotal time in my life. I was a young kid growing up in Rhode Island and I didn't know anything, really, about bigotry or racism, and that book pointed it out in the voice of a little girl, which appealed to me. And her dad (Atticus Finch), his ability to fight the good fight and step into other people's skin. When you're trying to determine your moral code moving forward, in that time in your life, your parents are influential, teachers are as well, but books are, too. And that book said to me, 'You can do the right thing, or you can do the wrong thing.'"







For me, the book's lasting success comes from its poignant story of Jean Louise, or Scout, whose love and respect for her father, Atticus, and his example gave her the courage to face the dangers and unfairness of a flawed world. It is also Atticus himself, the small town lawyer in the Jim Crow South of the 1930s, with his example of dignity, kindness and courage.

But it is much more complicated according to a new book, *Why To Kill a Mockingbird Matters: What Harper Lee's Book and the Iconic American Film Mean to Us Today*, by Tom Santopietro.

That staying power is remarkable, according to Santopietro, because in "the nearly sixty years since *Mockingbird* was originally published, the world has changed much more than the previous three hundred years combined."

Santopietro gives us a biography of the *Mockingbird* phenomenon. He takes us to Harper Lee's hometown, Monroeville, Alabama, and introduces us to the friends, family and neighbors who were models for the characters of her book, to her gentle home life, and the town's oppressive segregated social system.

In *Mockingbird*, Monroeville becomes the fictional town of Maycomb. Harper Lee as a child is the basis for the central character, the tomboy nicknamed Scout. Lee's father, A.C. Lee, is the model for Atticus Fitch. Her childhood friend, Truman Capote, becomes Scout's good friend, the irrepressible Dill. Her family's troubled neighbor, Sonny Boulware, is the inspiration for the mysterious, frightening and, ultimately, heroic Boo Radley.

Santopietro explains how *Mockingbird* was first written and then rewritten. Lee's early drafts focused on Jean Louise as a grown-up. The revisions eliminated the adult woman from the book and only told Scout's childhood story.

When the revised work was sold to a publisher, it took the country by storm and won the Pulitzer Prize.

Then came the movie staring Gregory Peck as Atticus. Santopietro devotes twice as many chapters to his account of the production of the movie as he does for the making of the book.

On UNC-TV's *North Carolina Bookwatch* recently, Santopietro explained how Peck's star power enhanced the role of Atticus. "Peck was also a smart Hollywood star, and he thought, 'I'm producing the film, I'm starring in the film, there's gonna be a big courtroom scene in there.' He was protecting his territory."

In that powerful courtroom scene, Atticus defends the black defendant, Tom Robinson, who is accused of the rape of a white woman. Atticus demonstrates Robinson's innocence, but the all-white, all-male jury convicts him nevertheless.

Mockingbird's powerful message of racial injustice and oppression was clear, in the book and the film. Certainly, race is an important factor in the book's continuing importance.

But Santopietro believes that something else explains why the book "still speaks to such a wide range of people."

On *Bookwatch*, he explained, "What the book to me is about that's so extraordinary — and I tried to write about this — it's about what I call the 'other,' the concept of anybody who does not feel like they fit in. Every one of us in this room, every human being at some point, feels like the 'other.' You talk differently, you walk differently, you act differently, and that's the journey through adolescence, which is universal.

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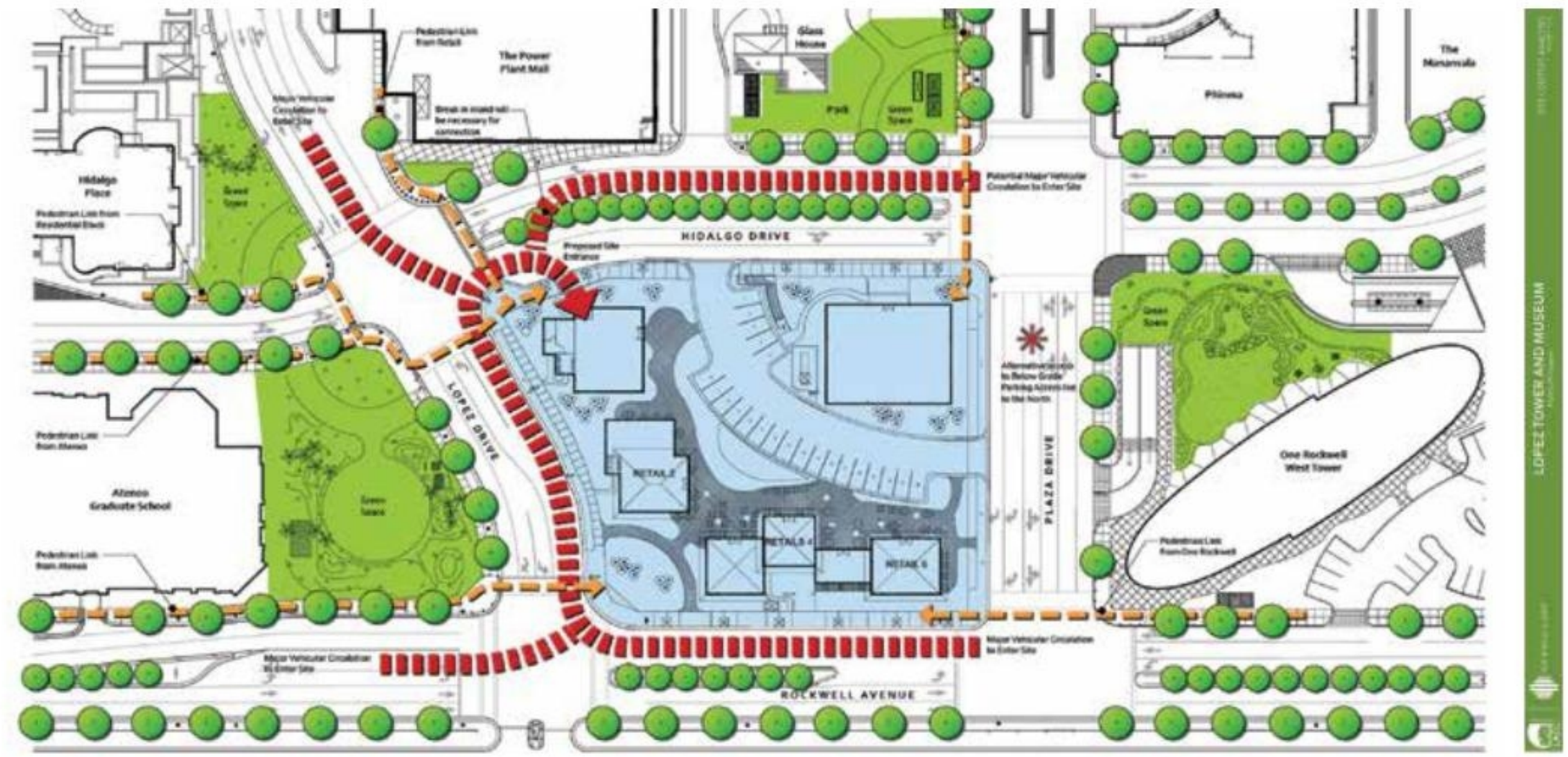

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We all have felt that way sometimes. And, what Harper Lee is saying is that when we're children, we think of the world as black and white, all good, all bad, but it's so many different shades of gray. That's our journey through adolescence, and she makes us realize that the people we fear, the monsters in our life, in fact can be our saviors. So, there are two people who fit the construct of the 'other' in *Mockingbird*. One is Tom Robinson, the African-American man unjustly accused of raping a white woman, and the other is Boo Radley. So, Scout and Jem think of Boo Radley as this monster in that dark house and, in fact, he's their savior at the end, and I think that universal journey through adolescence — as we all learn those lessons — that to me is why the book still matters."

In 2015, shortly before her death, the publication of Harper Lee's *Go Set a Watchman* gave us a different and disturbing look at Atticus in the 1950s, set 20 years after the events in *Mockingbird*.

On a visit home, Jean Louise sees Atticus leading a meeting of the local White Citizens' Council, one of many established throughout the South in the wake of the Brown v. Board of Education decision to resist the Supreme Court's and the NAACP's efforts to destroy "the Southern Way of Life."

Confronting Atticus, she says the Citizens' Council contradicts everything he had taught her. Do we now, like Jean Louise, have to push Atticus Finch out of our pantheon of heroic images?

Even though he is on the wrong side of history, Atticus' core human values win out as they lead Jean Louise to confront him and to make him proud of her for doing so.

Many of our parents and grandparents who lived in Atticus' times, like him, would never fully accept the changes the civil rights revolution brought to our region. But the core values of human kindness and respect for all people that they taught prepared their children to welcome and even work for those changes.

And for that, they and Atticus are for me, although imperfect, still heroes.

D.G. Martin hosts North Carolina Bookwatch, which premiers Tuesdays at 8 p.m. on the North Carolina Channel and airs on UNC-TV Sundays at 11 a.m. and Thursdays at 5 p.m.

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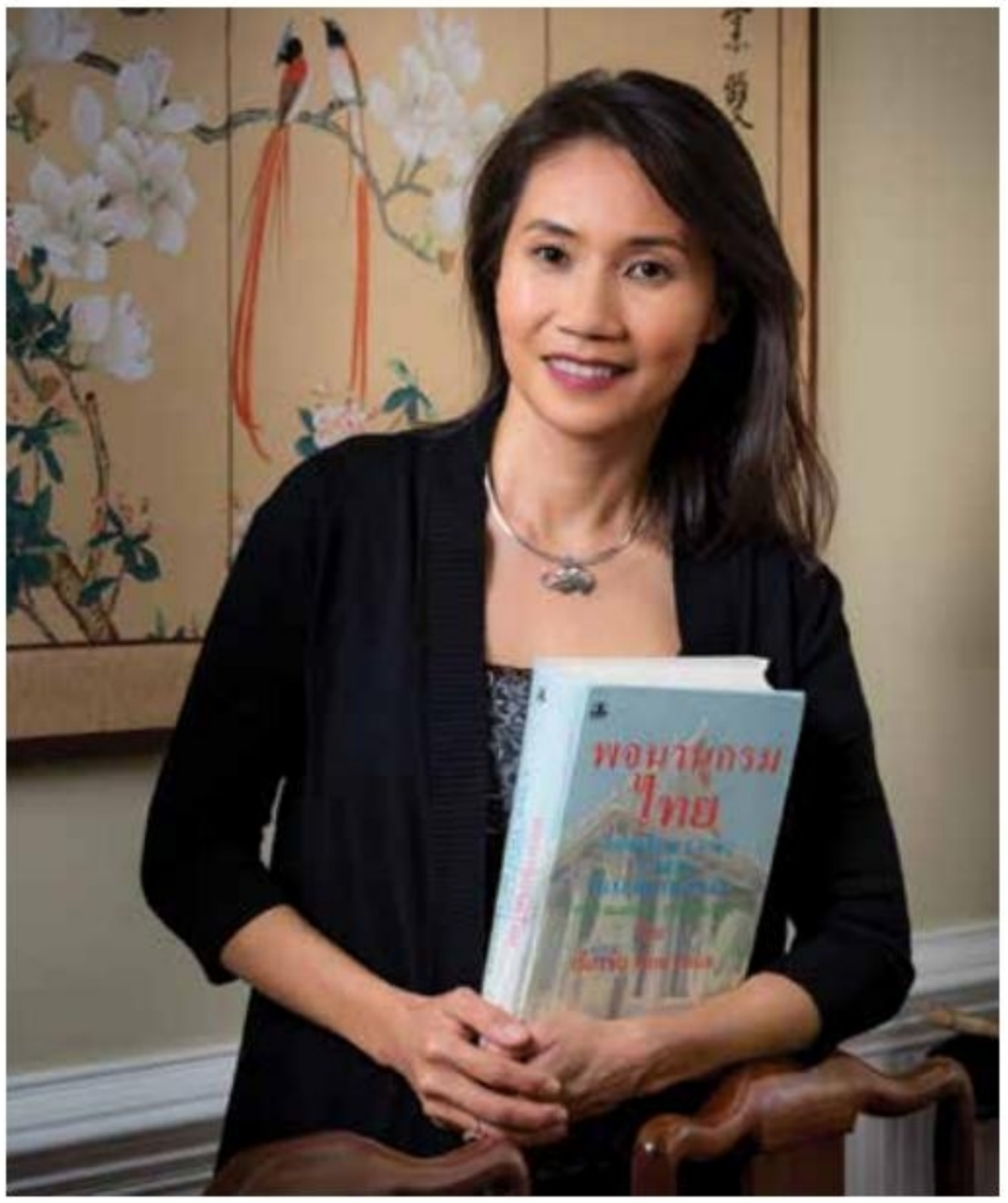

Soontaree Davidson

Job: Freelance interpreter and translator

First moved to Wilmington: 2008

Favorite spot: The access to the water, like Masonboro. That is such a sanctuary for me.

By Dana Sachs

You call yourself an interpreter. What's the difference between a translator and an interpreter?

The two are closely related. The difference is mainly in mode of expression. Translators deal with written text. Interpreters deal with spoken language, and we deliver it on the spot, and in both directions — meaning, in my case, from English to Thai, and Thai to English. We don't have time to use a dictionary.

That's high pressure.

It is high pressure, but most people think you just pop in and mimic whatever that person says. It's not necessarily the case. It has to do with preparation. Last week I went to a Department of Defense conference at Andrews Air Force Base. They tell you the date, when to show up, and they give you the general topic. That's it.

So how do you prepare?

You anticipate what might come up and Google anything that has to do with that topic. You're looking at different terrorist groups, different continents. For that one-day event, it takes about a week to prepare.

Is your job to summarize what a person said?

[There are] different levels of interpreting. "Consecutive Interpreting" means that the speaker will say something for about 30 seconds, then he or she pauses and the interpreter delivers. For "Simultaneous Interpreting," [we] speak along with the speakers and usually we are in a booth. There's a sound feed through our ears and we deliver our interpretation through [an] audio system.

Is one form of interpreting more reliable?

No. It depends on the context. In a bilateral meeting — two parties, each [with] one key speaker — then Consecutive is the mode. Usually, Simultaneous happens with multiple languages, like at a conference.

[In those cases], I don't do it alone. It's impossible. Our brain can only concentrate at a maximum of maybe 20 minutes in that active listening mode. I have a colleague and we alternate. It's almost like dancing. You need to know each other's moves.

Can you describe what happens in your brain while you're doing that kind of interpreting?

We all have a headset on. We use one ear to receive the message, then process and deliver it. And on the other ear, we don't use the headset so that we can hear that our delivery is understandable, that it's correct, and that it makes sense.

You're kind of like a computer, but you also have to understand the subtlety of language.

The cultural component is so critical. Idioms, for instance, are specific to a culture and you can't do a direct translation. You have to kind of maneuver it. Like you don't say, "It takes a village." You [say], "It takes a collective effort to accomplish something." Or, "The grass is greener." I would say, "We tend to envy what the others have."

In Consecutive interpreting, how do you remember everything someone said?

Note-taking and memory are key. You do active listening. And you try to compartmentalize your brain to memorize. There's a technique. And [with] note-taking, you need to build your own symbols. It's almost our own code [that works] as a reminder.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK STEELMAN

What are you some of your symbols?

Delta, the triangle, is "change" to me. For "exchange," I draw an arrow within that triangle. "Increase" is just an arrow up, and "decrease" is just an arrow down.

You've done a lot of high-level diplomatic interpreting. How does that work?

Diplomats bring their own interpreters. Let's say the defense minister of Thailand comes for a meeting with our secretary of defense. I will go with our secretary. The other side brings their own. For that level, I am responsible for whatever my principal — in this case, the secretary of defense — says. The other side brings their own because they want to be responsible for their own interpreting to avoid misunderstanding.

You've interpreted for President Obama, Vice President Biden, President Trump, Secretary of State Kerry, and Defense Secretary Mattis. What's it like to work at that level?

When I first started, I was very nervous. There's a lot of things that go into it, like the way you dress. Business attire. Black or neutral colors. Because there's a saying about interpreters: "We are to be heard, not to be seen." Because it's not your event. It's not about you.

Do you feel like the principals don't really see you?

It's a mix. I did interpretation for General Mattis, the defense secretary, at a bilateral event in Singapore. I sat right behind him and did my usual interpretation. And at the end, after the meeting was over, he turned around and thanked me for my service. We usually don't get recognized. We usually get our job done and then step away. That's a very memorable moment for me.

Official summits often include receptions where heads of state mingle. How do all those world leaders talk with each other?

Most of the leaders can carry on general social conversation [in English], like "How are you?" But when it gets deeper, [the interpreters] step in. I did that, for example, for President Obama at the [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] summit in 2016. [At these kind of events], somebody will

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come and say, "OK. I need Cambodia. I need Thai. I need Lao. Follow me." And we usually stay 10 steps away and we look for clues. It's an art to know when to step in, because you otherwise might insult the prime minister of Thailand. You don't want to come out like, "Oh, he doesn't know English at all." You look at the body language. When President Obama walked over and said something to the [prime minister] of Thailand, then I stepped in to do my job. And then when he was done, I stepped away. If he walked over to talk to the state leader of Vietnam, then the Vietnamese interpreter stepped forward.

That's such an odd scene to imagine.

It's very natural for them. At the world leader level, they have worked with interpreters before. They know how to handle it.

So, for example, you say, "He'd like to meet soon"?

No, we always refer to ourselves in the first person. We would never say, "He said this." "She said this." If President Obama said, "I would like you to come to visit the United States sometime," then I say, "I would like to you to come to visit the United States sometime." When the president of the United States says something, then I become the voice of the president of the United States in Thai.

After President Trump's private meeting with Russian President Putin in July, Democrats raised the possibility of asking the interpreters about what the two men said when they were alone. Many interpreters balked. Is there a code of silence?

It's not a code. It's a private conversation. Whatever he said, I should not be out there going, "Oh, he said so and so." Absolutely not. It's like doctor-patient confidentiality.

What if . . .

No matter what.

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Poetry and Protest

The gravity of the written and spoken word

By Wiley Cash · Photographs by Mallory Cash

Khalisa Rae is a star, and like a star her presence bends the fabric of the universe in a way that draws creative people into her orbit: writers, activists, choreographers and artists. But it is not simply people who are drawn to Khalisa. Justice projects, writers' workshops and femme empowerment movements have all found their way to her. Or maybe I have it wrong. Perhaps she is not the star but the explorer drawn to burning centers of mass where historical infernos rage hot and bright, where smoke burns the eyes, and where the good work of community building can begin once the fire is sated.

Khalisa Rae is a poet, feminist speaker, performance artist and educator who holds an MFA from Queens University in Charlotte, North Carolina. Her first collection of poems, *Real Girls Have Real Problems*, was published in 2012, and she has been a finalist for the Furious Flower Gwendolyn Brooks poetry prize. Her collection *Outside the Canon: Poetry as Protest* is forthcoming.

I first entered Khalisa's orbit when my friend Lori Fisher told me the two of them had joined forces to start Athenian Press and Workshop in Wilmington. Along with a few others, the two women envisioned Athenian as an "anti-racist, feminist, creative organization" that would offer space for writers, artists and activists to work alone, together, and with their communities to effect change. According to their mission statement, the organization is based on core values that include social justice, feminism, accessibility, community building, sustainability and independence. Before long they had found a home they called Athenian House, where they regularly hosted open mics, readings, meetings and other community events.

When I met Khalisa at Drift Coffee in Wilmington's Autumn Hall neighborhood in early November, I quickly learned that Athenian was only one of the many projects she had initiated, joined or planned to start, all of them centered on the writer's role in social justice and community organizing.

Drift Coffee has done an exquisite job marrying the laid-back feel of Wilmington's beach community with the city's upscale tastes in fine coffee and food. The menu is focused and healthy, combining standard breakfast fare with surprises like the Acai Bowl that features house-made granola and the Za'atar Spiced Chicken Sandwich with apple and tomato chutney and a tahini spread on sourdough bread. Drift's light-filled interior is bright and welcoming with white walls, slate-colored cement floors, and comfortable tables and chairs where people are just as likely to be holding business meetings as catching up with friends.

Khalisa and I ordered some coffee and found seats in a sun-drenched corner. I asked her what had brought her to Wilmington

from her native Chicago.

"I wanted to write films," she says. "And this was the place to do it, so I came to UNCW."

But it was not long until Khalisa's passion for writing turned toward poetry, and she found an opportunity to work with activist poets in Greensboro. She left the Port City for an undergraduate degree at North Carolina A&T. A few years after graduating, she found herself in Wilmington again, working in community outreach and programming for the YWCA, leading workshops in writing and diversity training around the city, and eventually discovering the literary and cultural home she had not found as an undergraduate.

The more time Khalisa spent in Wilmington, the more she uncovered painful remnants of the city's racial strife, strife that is grounded in events like the wrongful convictions of the Wilmington 10 and the 1898 coup d'état, which is the only successful coup in American history and an event that would greatly affect Khalisa's work as a poet and activist.

While working at the Cameron Art Museum as part of their Kids at Cam initiative, Khalisa met Brittany Patterson, an artist and social worker who had just seen the 1898

documentary *Wilmington on Fire*. Patterson and Khalisa began a discussion about how to use art to repair the racial rifts that had run through Wilmington for more than a century.

"We wanted to curate something that was a medley of poetry and dance to focus on how 1898 affects people today," says Rae. But the goal was not simply a performance. "The first thing we did was to have the cast sit in a circle and talk about what it means to be a person of color, what it means to be a white person moving

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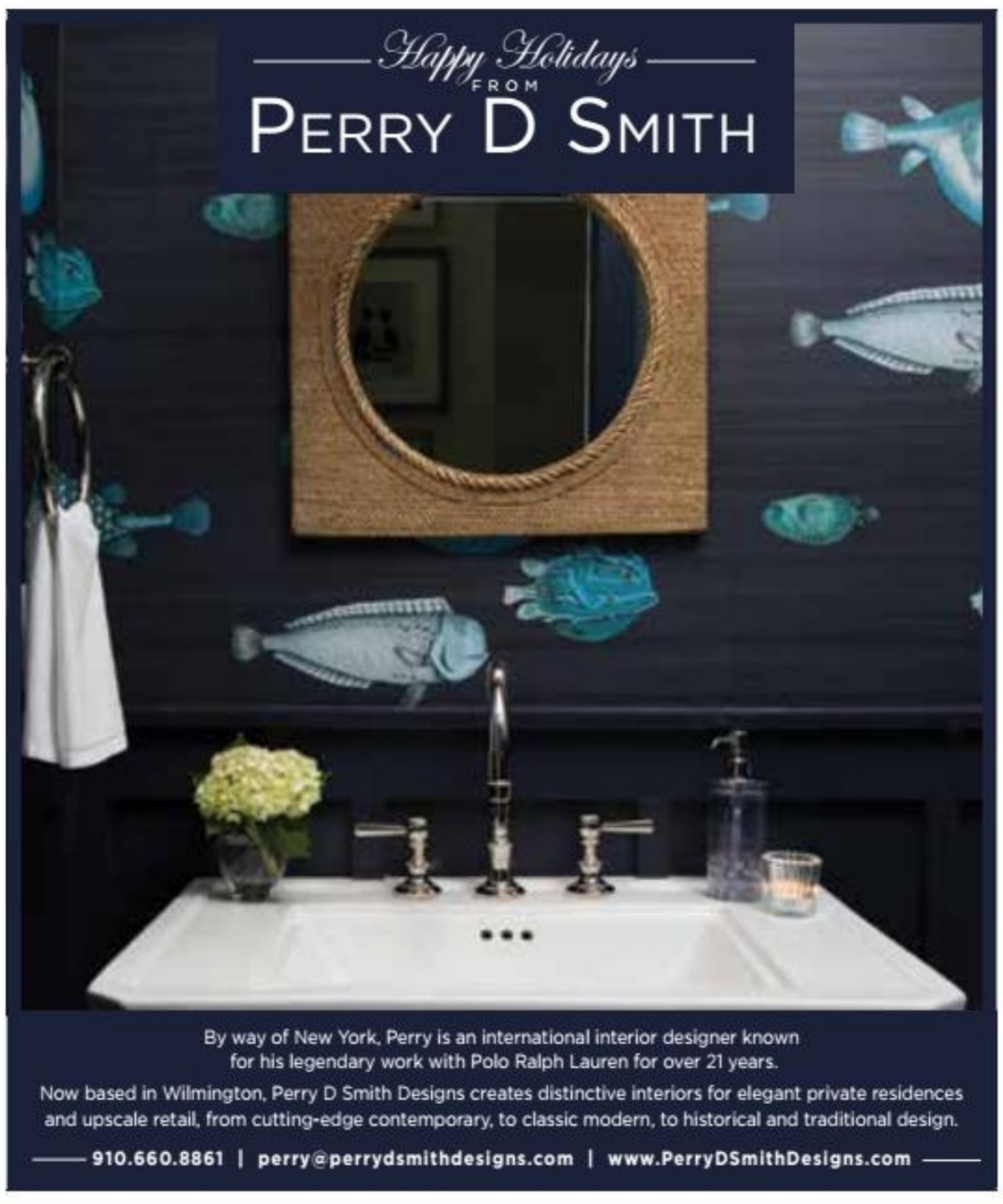
around in spaces with people of color who were all affected by 1898."

The outcome was the Invisibility Project, a performance that reaches across racial lines and combines dance choreographed by Patterson and spoken word poetry written and performed by Khalisa. The group's first performance was in 2017, and their work has continued since with a special production to commemorate the 120th anniversary of the 1898 coup.

"It's been interesting," she says. "I've learned so much about this community, about what certain public spaces mean to certain groups of people, about how the past can push down on you without you understanding why."

Khalisa and I finished our coffee. Nearly two hours had passed, and our conversation had run from our early fascinations with the written word to our hopes for our city's racial reconciliation. As we got up to leave I could not help but feel pulled toward her energy and passion. I could say it was gravitational, but perhaps my feelings were anchored by the gravity of this generation's struggle to reach through Wilmington's painful past in the hope that, once the fire is out, there will be a hand to grasp.

Wiley Cash lives in Wilmington with his wife and their two daughters. His latest novel, The Last Ballad, *is available wherever books are sold.*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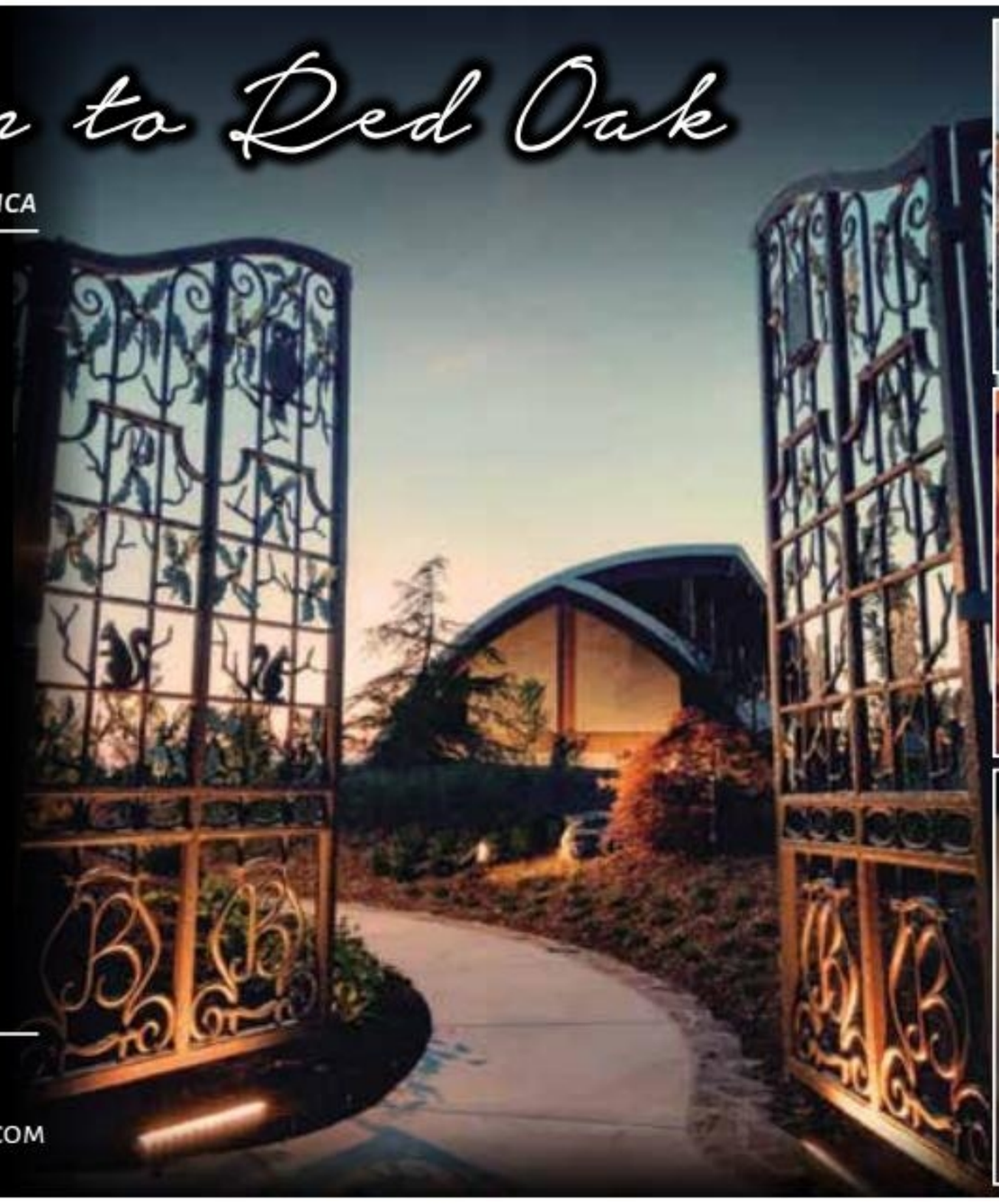

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Our Friends and Family Tree

Faces that speak to the heart

By Bev Moss Haedrich

It was our first Christmas back in the South. I sat cross-legged on the sofa leafing through a large cache of holiday cards. Loose photos and those slipped inside the folds of notes and letters were vivid reminders of friends' day trips to the coast, Navy football games up north, and our own anniversaries relaxing at Lake Lure. The preprinted messages of *Merry Christmas* or *Happy Holidays From our House to Yours* left me feeling nostalgic.

The faded picture of a dear friend reminded me that it's been ages since we've spoken; I must give her a call. A photo of my mom and her two sisters, all sadly gone now, gave me three reasons to smile. I laughed aloud at one of myself at 12 or 13 with a zit on my nose and space between my two front teeth.

Settling in with a few albums at my side, I revisited old friends, distant relatives, precious pets, those still with us, and some who are not. Each occupied a generous space in my heart. They also occupied an enormous area in my already tight closets, presenting me with a perennial dilemma I was determined to solve: Before this year's new crop of holiday photos arrived and became mere garland taped around another doorway, how could I preserve the best of them — and some old family photos, as well — in a meaningful holiday fashion?

As I opened a worn box, inspiration came knocking. I found a simple gold frame from my early cross-stitch days. It wasn't exactly what I had in mind, but perhaps with a dash of color and flecks of sparkle, something like this small frame — indeed, a tree full of small framed photos — might be just the solution. The seed of an idea, a friends and family Christmas tree, had sprouted.

With the gold trinket tucked safely in hand, I began my search. In no time, I found a mirror, of all things, at a local shop that fit snugly in my palm. There were dozens on display, and each shimmered with brilliant, colorful beads in shades of greens, blues, reds and some even with white pearls.

I cupped my hand around the frame and imagined a photo at its center. The delicate pearl frames could be for tender moments captured with newborns or newlyweds; the blue ones for those frolicking times at the beach. Myriad options came to mind when I visualized all the colors dancing across the branches in some whimsical fun.

For weeks I relived special moments of my childhood from the gift of a baseball, bat and glove to all the places we visited and those we called home. There was an abundance of keepers in those old boxes and between the pages of those tattered albums. I laughed at some and cried over others. There were photos of cousins on their first day of school, sleeping newborns, and grinning toddlers galore. In another, my brother sports a cowboy hat and refuses to mount a bicycle with wobbly training wheels. His grimace says it all. I chuckled recalling the comedy of my own attempts at learning to ride back then. These moments were bittersweet reminders of how quickly time really does pass.

My most cherished photo was one of my infant son taken months before he could walk, and some 40 years ago now. We were waist-high in a pool for a Mom and Tots swim class. I remember the instructor's encouraging words: "Just let him see the joy in your face when he comes up." I take a deep breath and sigh. If only I could hold his hands and hug him tight, just one more time, surely my heart would be filled with complete joy.

I wondered where the years had gone. Babies don't stay babies forever, my grandmother used to say. My granddaughter smiled earlier this fall when I repeated those very words as she headed off to college. Her dreams and best wishes for success neatly arranged in her backpack, I knew just how proud my baby would be of his.

Some Christmas trees are adored at a distance. Ours, with its patchwork of friends and family, nudge visitors — young and old alike — in for a closer look. Something magical happens when the eyes of a little one widen as they catch a glimpse of a picture of themselves. They giggle, and the reflection of the tree lights surround them like a cherub's halo.

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It warms my heart to add new ornaments each year and to witness the priceless expressions when friends discover their photos dangling from a branch of our decorated tree. My husband reminds them of something I often say, "If you're on our friends and family tree, you'll be in our hearts forever."

Bev Moss Haedrich lives in Wilmington, where she holds workshops to encourage others to write their own heartfelt stories. She writes both fiction and nonfiction. Contact her at bevsletterproject@gmail.com.

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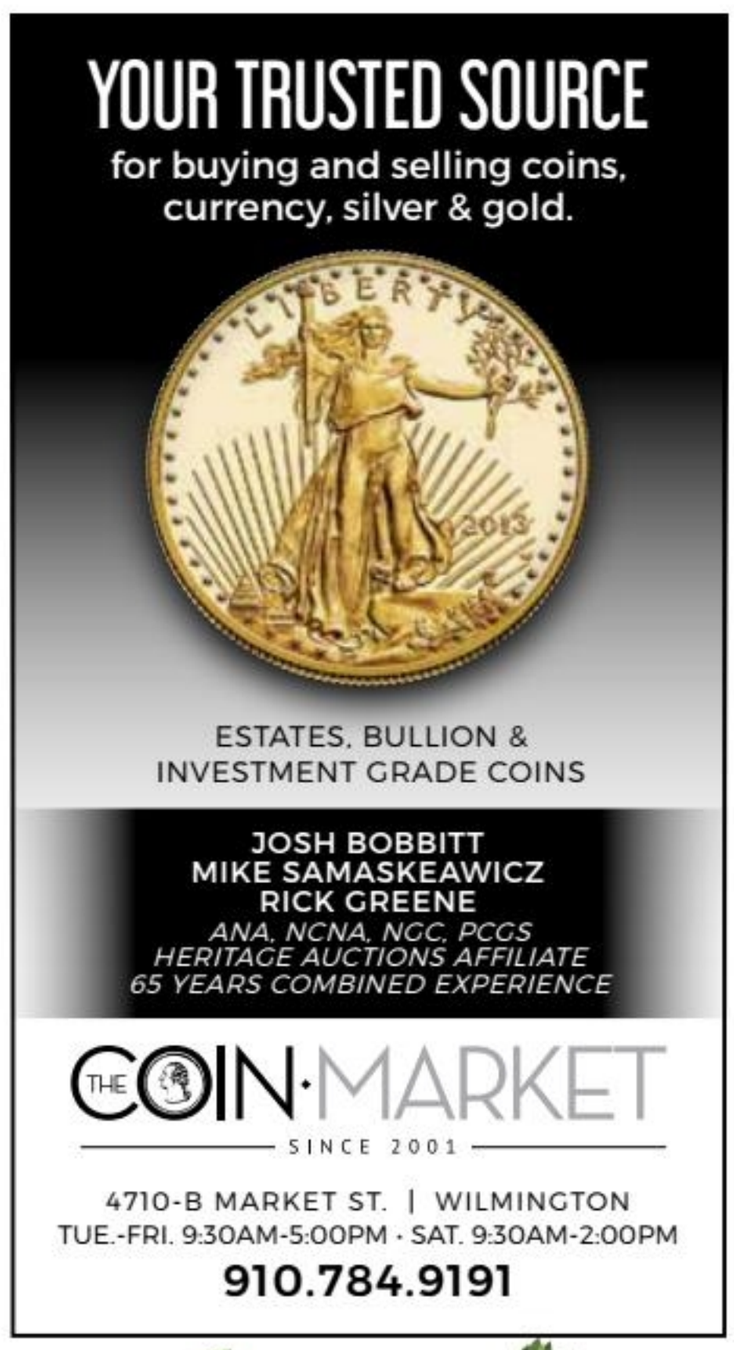

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An Ode to Winter

Surf's up. And so's the moon

By Fritts Causby

The sky hung wet and low and dreary. A steady rain and a steely gray overcast blanketed our little city that day, Monday, the day of necessities. Had it not been for work or school or some other endeavor, staying home would have been a great idea. Going out meant dealing with the crowds and the traffic and the headaches in the middle of the consistent wind and rainfall.

In short, it wasn't a day that you would see on a travel brochure. Or a day that would make you want to move here. It was not a postcard, or a day that would motivate someone from Raleigh to drive down and surf. It was one of those grind it out, head down, get-it-done-and-go-home type of days, where finding a little beauty in the chaos seemed harder than ever. Then it happened: The rain let up and the wind stopped blowing. I had been surfing beside the pier for about an hour, mostly by myself. The waves were consistent and fun, chest to shoulder high and chunky.

A rainbow came out and spread across the pier. A break in between the sets and time slowed down. I suddenly realized, "Wow, this is insane, it's only getting better, this is beautiful, where is everyone?" It had been easy to park, there was nobody on the beach, and overall, it was a lonely, quiet scene. I had even moved the car after checking the surf, knowing that I wouldn't have trouble finding a different spot. Traffic on the way to the island had also been virtually nonexistent.

I love wintertime. Yes, the water was 50 degrees that day. Yes, it was horrible and embarrassing struggling into my wetsuit (and out of my wetsuit) in public. The air was in the mid-50s, not too bad for southeast North Carolina in the wintertime, but the north wind that was cleaning up the surf made it feel so much colder.

What did it matter? Once I was sealed up in my neoprene cocoon and bobbing out in the lineup, the chill and the inconvenience of surfing in the wintertime seemed irrelevant. It was almost completely quiet, and here I was just sitting on my board, when a moment that made me stop dead in my tracks and realize how lucky I am to be alive had smacked me in the face. Feeling fortunate and grateful about the simplicity of who you are and what you are doing is essential to finding happiness.

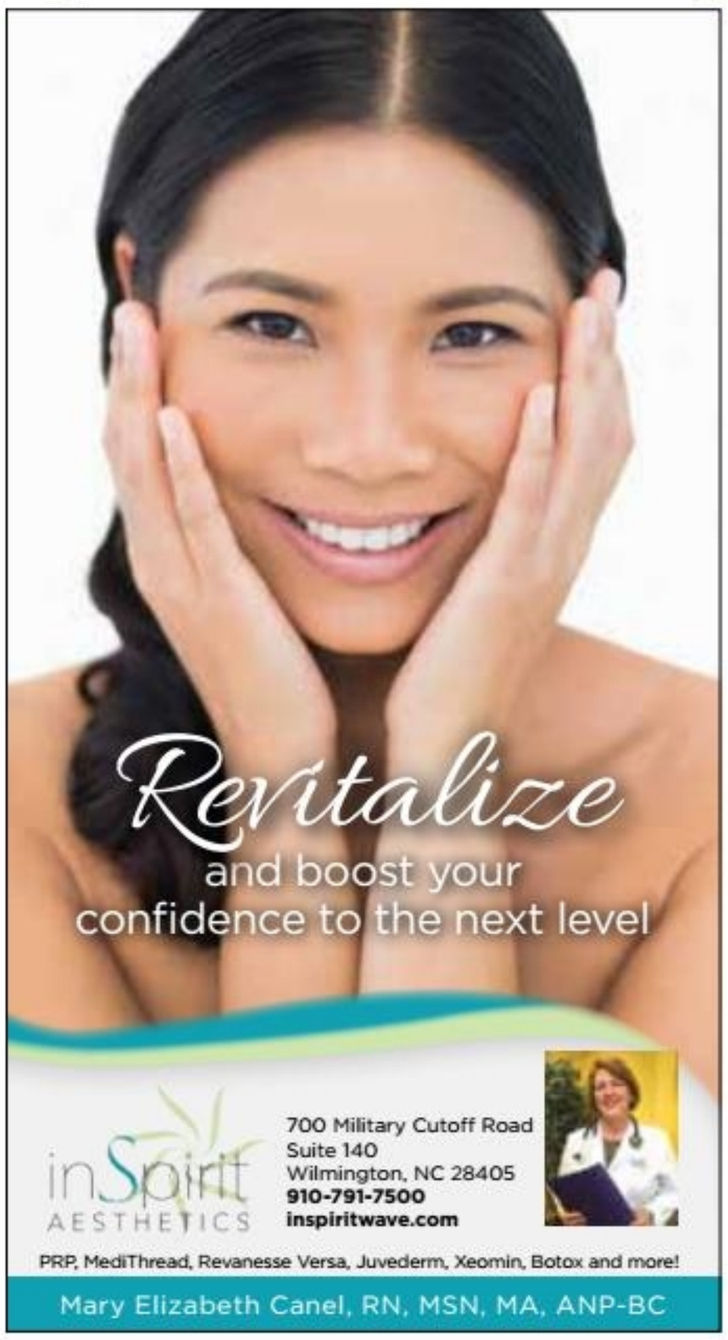
The clouds disappeared along with the sun. A giant full moon was suddenly revealed, hovering just above the pier. The water turned a silky, silvery gray, an oil slick canvas underneath a bright, clear sky. To say the least, it was a surreal moment. With the moonlight and the artificial light from the pier working together, I was still able to see, so I stayed out for a few minutes. Who wouldn't want to linger on for a while and try to record a fleeting moment in time like that?

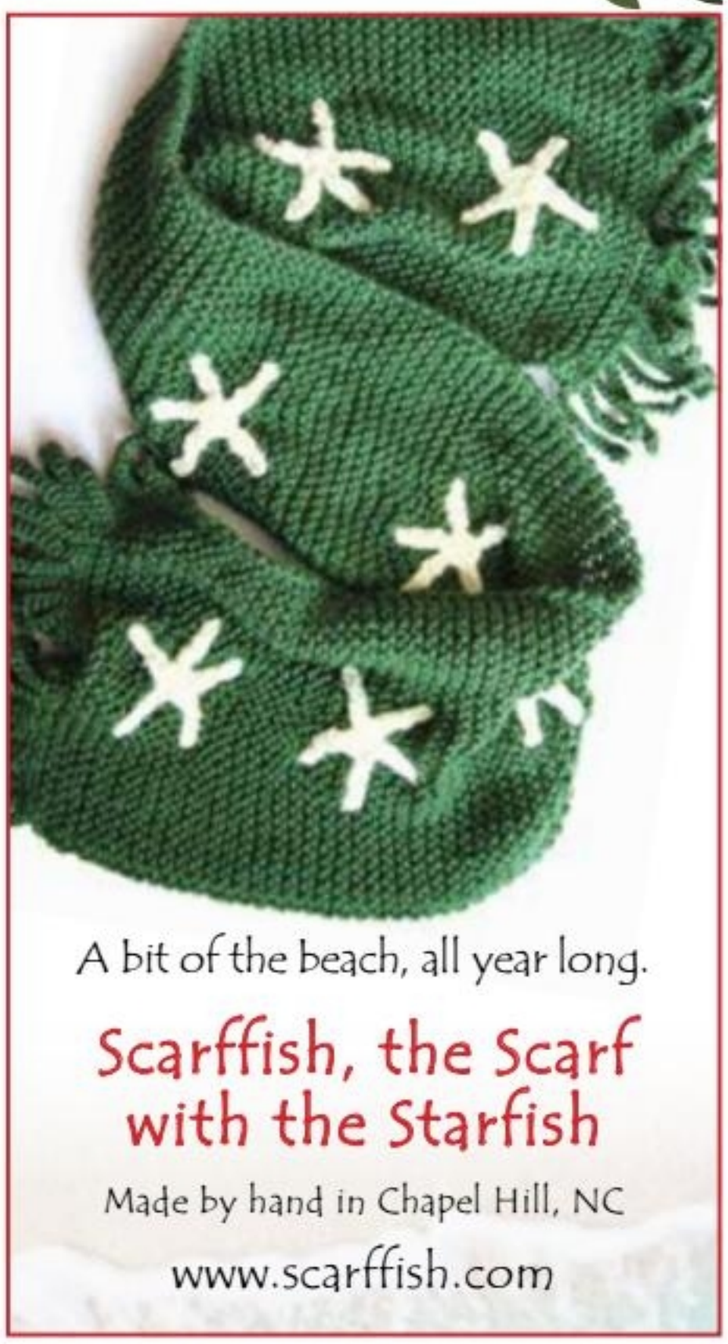
To really slow down and enjoy life, it's key to find breath and joy and calm in the little things. Surfing has given me a pathway to achieving that state of simplicity and happiness. Maybe if all of us had something like that in our lives, the vibe here on Planet Earth would be a tiny bit cooler, so if you're reading this and thinking, "Wow, I wish I knew what that felt like," get out there and find it.

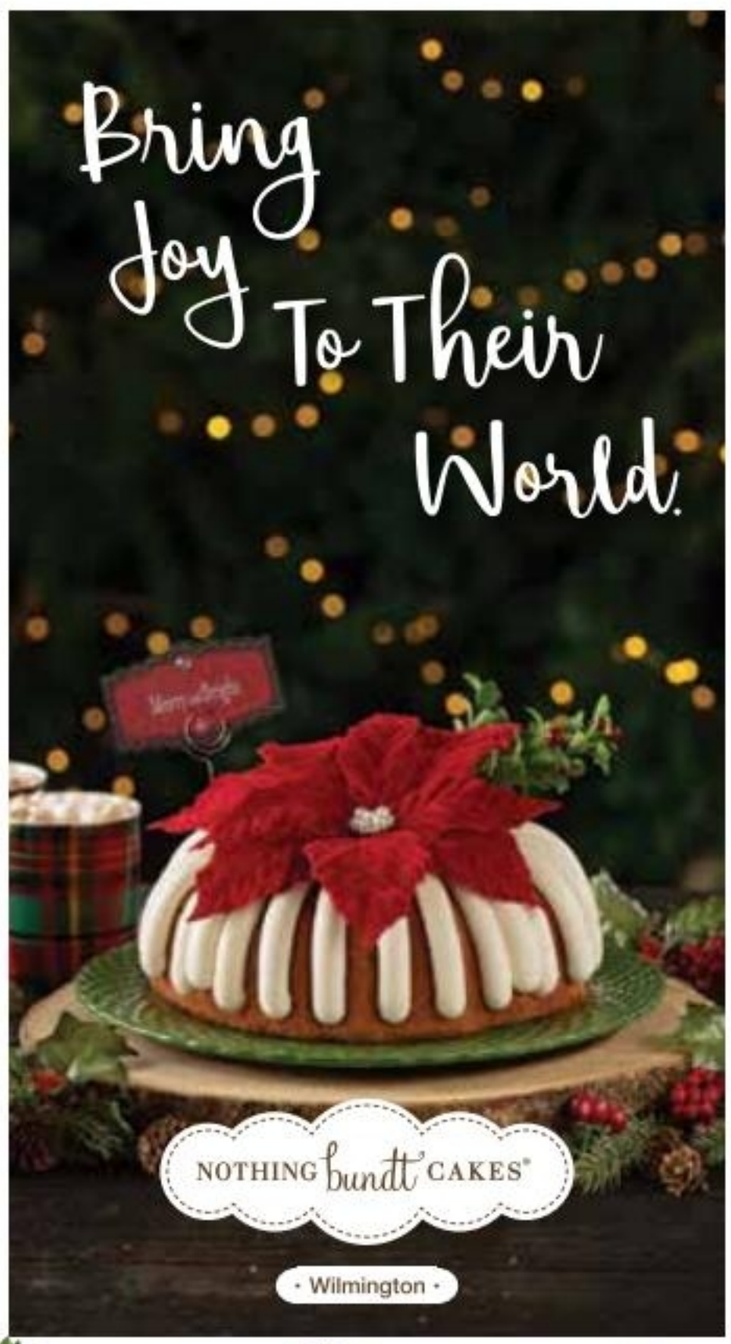
Fritts Causby is a long-term resident of the Wilmington area and the founder of WordAlly.com. A freelance writer for many years and a licensed Realtor, he is also an avid surfer, environmentalist and dad to Bridget.

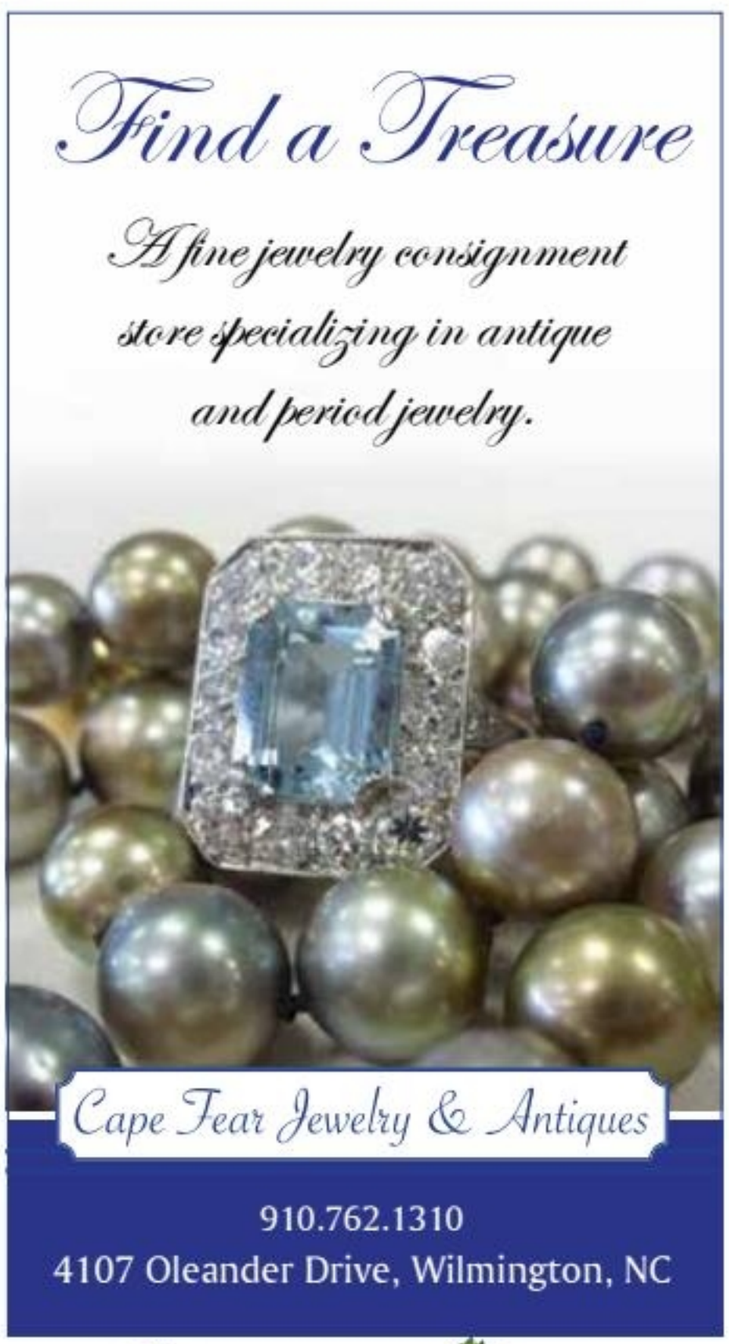
PHOTOGRAPH FROM FRITTS CAUSBY

Local Holiday Favorites 2018









A Changed Man

How Florence and a turkey shoot made me a better soul

I, your faithful Lord Wilmington, am a changed man.

I dare say the gasbags in Britain's House of Commons, which I ruled as speaker with a leisurely and well-manicured hand 300 years ago, wouldn't recognize me if I trod right over their improperly polished buckled pumps. They were quite fond of saying I had muscles the texture of milk, which also matched my skin color.

While it was true I used face powder liberally and skillfully, their assertion that I was too weak to swing the Parliamentary gavel was a gross exaggeration typical of the loose talk that infected politics then, as it does now. (As my beloved mother, Mary Noel, liked to say, "Loose talk is the least and the worst all in the same breath.")

No, I deferred the gavel-pounding to my assistant because of the infernal clatter and the possibility of breaking a fingernail. At the time I maintained my tall and willowy figure by gardening and sitting farthest from the dining table, near the bottle of port.

But since arriving here to immerse myself in this fair and aqueous city named for me, I, Lord Spencer Compton, the Earl of Wilmington, have grown vastly in both size and strength. It began with long walks throughout the realm, acquainting myself with peers and commoners alike, as well as with the architecture and the amazingly rich and diverse land that I had given my noble protege Gabriel Johnston to govern.

My Queen Street landlord, Marcus Holmes, took one look at my aforementioned milkiness and convinced me to start surfing and fishing the many beaches in the area. I began wearing short pants without hose for the first time and slowly bronzing my skin to the color of the slightly sweetened tea I've grown to prefer.

While Holmes laughed at the sight of my overly tall figure tentatively surfing Wrightsville Beach — "you look like Ichabod Crane on a tongue depressor," he quipped — I have learned to understand and love this so-called "salt life."

But it was Florence who completely changed me. No, not a woman (although I now have a female companion for the first time), but the hurricane.

On the blustery day Florence was to arrive, Holmes brought a large chainsaw and placed it in front of me at the dining table. "This will be your companion for a while, Lord Compton," he said. "Let us acquaint you with it." (In exchange for shepherding me through my new life, I am teaching him the proper King's English.) Since he had introduced me to one of my favorite new pastimes — motorcycling — I listened intently to his instructions on how to wield and maintain the powerful Stihl MS-391, which he assured me would make a man of me, "or, if you don't watch out, a half-a-man."

The next morning, while the leaden and unexpectedly dry skies announced the vast eye of the hurricane had arrived, we went to work opening the neighborhood streets blocked by the trees we had heard crashing down through that long, wild night.

"Shouldn't we wait for the city workers to do this, or at least for the storm to depart?" I asked, looking uncertainly at the smoldering, bomb-like skies above Fifth and Castle streets.

"That's not how we roll in Coastal Carolina," Holmes replied.

"How we proceed," I corrected him somewhat nervously.

For the next three weeks I chainsawed in the streets, on the sidewalks, in trees, in our yard and those of neighbors and friends. Each night I would drop into bed like someone bludgeoned. Each morning Holmes would bring us to some new family to help. I dragged branches until my arms and legs screamed like the human geese in my old House of Commons.

We walked roofs to clear or patch them. I helped the practically superhuman Allen Walker (Wilmington's Tom Sawyer of WalkerWorld fame) saw and nail Tennessee timbers onto his father's Queen Street shop roof, half of which had been ripped away.

I must repeat something I heard more than a few local residents say:

"Hurricane Florence was the best thing to happen to me." For these people, mostly commoners, insurance settlements and federal disaster relief meant new roofs to replace worn-out ones; it brought new floors and furniture they had only dreamed of purchasing; and inspired home, garage and yard clean-ups that had been put off for years.

But for me, Florence made me a bigger, better person. My milky muscles grew beefy and corded. "So hard a cat couldn't scratch 'em," as my landlord crudely but proudly stated. Before I came to Wilmington, I could wear a size 44 silk waistcoat, with brocaded trim. Now I'm wearing a 52-long Levi's jacket.

"I think you're ready for a turkey shoot," Holmes said once the non-stop clean-up finally eased. He knows how much I want to absorb all

things Coastal Carolina.

"By all means," I replied, envisioning an invigorating canter over the countryside, the booming of musketry blending with the cries of beaters flushing the fowl.

"What shall I wear? Hunting shirt? Breeches with spatterdashes?"

"Nope. Just jeans, a sweatshirt and your chainsaw boots."

We drove north on Route 17 past Hampstead and Holly Ridge, turning west into the deep country just before Jacksonville, the sun setting on this crisp, first Saturday in November.

There was a fire in a barrel and a crowd around it when we pulled up behind the Haws Run Volunteer Rescue Squad near Cow Barn Road. This local rescue squad was born in 1974, I soon learned from proud volunteers. Before that, injured or seriously ill residents who didn't have kin to take them to the hospital had to call the local funeral home for help and transport.

"But where are the turkeys?" I asked.

"In the freezer," Holmes replied as my smartly attired ladyfriend quickly befriended some of the girls cavorting around the fire barrel.

"Years ago they had live turkeys you could win," said Frank Rackley, who, at 73, said he's "as old as my tongue and a little older than my teeth." He wore a cast on his hand from a fall while working on a nearby Florence-battered church.

You don't shoot at turkeys, he explained from a padded bench by the fire, but at paper targets stapled to 12 lighted posts roughly 30 yards away.

For $3 you get a shotgun shell filled with birdshot to fire at your designated target. Every round, the one among the 12 shooters whose target has a pellet hole closest to the crosshairs wins a nice, fat holiday turkey. "But we didn't bring a shotgun," I said with a side-long glance at my new companion, who took the hint. "Why, you don't expect me to let you use my shotgun to shoot against my son-in-law, do you?" Mr. Rackley said, nodding at the bearded, rafter-scraping-sized Sean Kenny, who held a firearm that looked to be broken in half. Then the gentleman smiled, saying of course I could use his 40-year-old weapon. "But I won't tell you its secrets."

I signed up to shoot at target 11 in round

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one, familiarizing myself with what I learned was a traditional break action single-barrel 12 gauge. I was known as a fair shot at the Kit-Cat Club in London, and I wanted to acquit myself nicely in my first foray into the deep country. Besides, winning a turkey in time for Thanksgiving suddenly sounded rather sporting and delicious.

My pink-slacked, black-turtlenecked and black-booted companion, Lady Je, introduced me to Alexa Parker, a flannel-shirted and beaming 10-year-old who tells me that it's also her first time at a turkey shoot and her first time firing a shotgun.

"I'm excited!" she exclaimed, holding tightly to the hand of Lady Je, who later shared that the girl had missed a year of school with heart problems and was somehow sure the world was going to end this very night. "I am excited as well, lass," I responded to Alexa truthfully.

When it was Alexa's turn, she stepped up boldly and, after being carefully spotted and braced by family friend C.J. Wurm, pulled the trigger. She skipped back to the fire, rubbing her shoulder and reaching for her new friend to tell her all about it.

I strode up, loaded confidently and fired like an old hand. But when the targets were gathered for examination by the exquisitely bearded and eagle-eyed assistant squad Chief Mike Caley, I discovered I hadn't outshot Alexa, who had managed to lightly pepper her target.

Caley and his shiny calipers, watched over by a halo of shooters, determined the winner of round one was 51-year-old Tom Vaughn. He's an avid pool shooter who has fought a debilitating bone disease his entire life. These turkey shoots are always a highlight, he told me, because he can limp up to the firing line and compete squarely against all the others with his gleaming, hand-finished shotgun. "He said he was going to win the first turkey of the year," said his wife, Dawn Marie. (It was the first shoot of the season.) "Now he can go home happy." A short time later, during round three, Tom Vaughn won again. "First time that's happened," he said happily of his two-turkey night.

During the next 10 rounds, which included chili dogs and coffee, I got to know and admire my fellow shooters, the squad members and their families. The man most feared on the firing line was Rick Miller, a grizzled Marine veteran and former helicopter crew chief who reminded me of your popular actor Sam Elliott.

Miller, a gunsmith since he got out of the Corps in 1991, has been a regular at this squad's shoot for decades, starting back when it was held at the old station up Haws Run Road. "Sometimes there'd be 400 people there," he said. "One time they went 46 rounds." Such was the popularity of the once-common fundraisers for volunteer fire departments and rescue squads across the South.

This night there were 50 to 75 people at one of the very few turkey shoots remaining in coastal North Carolina, and the closest to Wilmington.

The lean, rugged and camouflaged C.J. Wurm, who had spotted Alexa, did the same for three other kids, all of them even younger. It's a crucial experience for the youngsters, he said. "Get them into nature. It's not video games." He would tie Miller in one of the later rounds.

"Shoot off!" called out Caley as he looked up from the targets and his calipers on his lighted table. "Awwww!" Wurm exclaimed, certain the dead-eyed gunsmith would win the tie-breaker. But he didn't. Lady Je, who had never fired a shotgun before, was encouraged by Alexa's bravery to participate in this adventure.

We would use Wurm's shotgun after Mr. Rackley went home to rest his Florence fracture. And later, Tom Vaughn volunteered his glistening pump shotgun, with which I narrowly missed winning round 11.

As Holmes drove us back to Wilmington through the starlit countryside, we felt warmed by this fall-and-winter holiday tradition. Lady Je spoke of how touched she was by Alexa, whom she called her "little Christmas angel."

"What I don't quite understand," I said, "is why these souls were so willing to share their weapons with someone from another land, from another time, to compete against them."

"Because that's the way we roll in Coastal Carolina," Holmes answered. I felt no urge to correct his English as I looked out the window.

As I stated earlier, your Lord Wilmington is a changed man. — *Spencer Compton*

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Purple Sandpiper

Quirky and hearty, the stout little rock-hoppers are right at home around bridges and jetties

By Susan Campbell

Sandpipers are, as a group, small birds that you would not think could endure the winter months. But some certainly can, such as sanderlings and black-bellied plovers that one can find on open beaches without much searching. And then there's the purple sandpiper. These stout little rock- hoppers favor jetties and bridge abutments that experience frequent wash-over. The high-impact habitats develop significant algal growth with a rich assortment of invertebrates favored by these quirky individuals.

Purple sandpipers are dark, husky birds with short legs and necks. The grayish, speckled pattern of their plumage is good camouflage against the rocky areas they frequent year-round. A purple sheen is only visible during the non-breeding season and only at very close range. Their bills are relatively short, orange at the base and slightly downturned. Such a tool proves a very effective tool for picking a variety of insect larvae, crustaceans and more from aquatic vegetation as well as grabbing morsels out of nooks and crannies between rocks. Purple sandpipers can be all but invisible when standing still in intertidal areas. This is a helpful trick, since these open areas can be favored hunting grounds for peregrine falcons and other fast- moving avian predators.

During the summer, pairs breed in low tundra and on gravel beaches in the far northern reaches of Canada, as well as in northern Europe. Using simply the camouflage of their feathers and that of their mottled eggs to evade predation, adults may also employ distraction displays if approached by mammals or large birds. In what is referred to as the "rodent run" strategy, an adult will puff up, raise a wing, start running and emit loud squeaks in hopes of drawing the threat away from the nest or fledglings. Like all sandpipers, the young are covered with a thick layer of down and can run and even feed themselves within a few hours after hatching.

Unfortunately, the worldwide population of purple sandpipers is unknown. These little birds nest in very remote areas in the Arctic, and many migrate across the open ocean. Therefore, surveying them is very challenging. Canadian estimates have documented a sharp decline in the breeding population to our north. But here along the southeastern coast of the state, you can find congregations of wintering birds well into February if you know how and where to look. The best places to scan are the Wrightsville Beach Jetty, Masonboro Inlet and the rockier beaches on Bald Head Island. However, be prepared by dressing in a couple of warm layers of outerwear, and go armed with good binoculars as well as a spotting scope if possible. Purple sandpipers are fairly shy, so move carefully. Otherwise they likely will see you before you see them and flush before you can get a good look. Nevertheless, the quest is a fun challenge for sure: an annual rite that I will be undertaking very soon.

Susan would love to receive your wildlife sightings and photos. She can be contacted at susan@ncaves.com.

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Christmas Poem

I cannot write a Christmas
poem for you,
not with all those slick verses
oozing through the mail,
the schmaltzy music whining
on the radio.

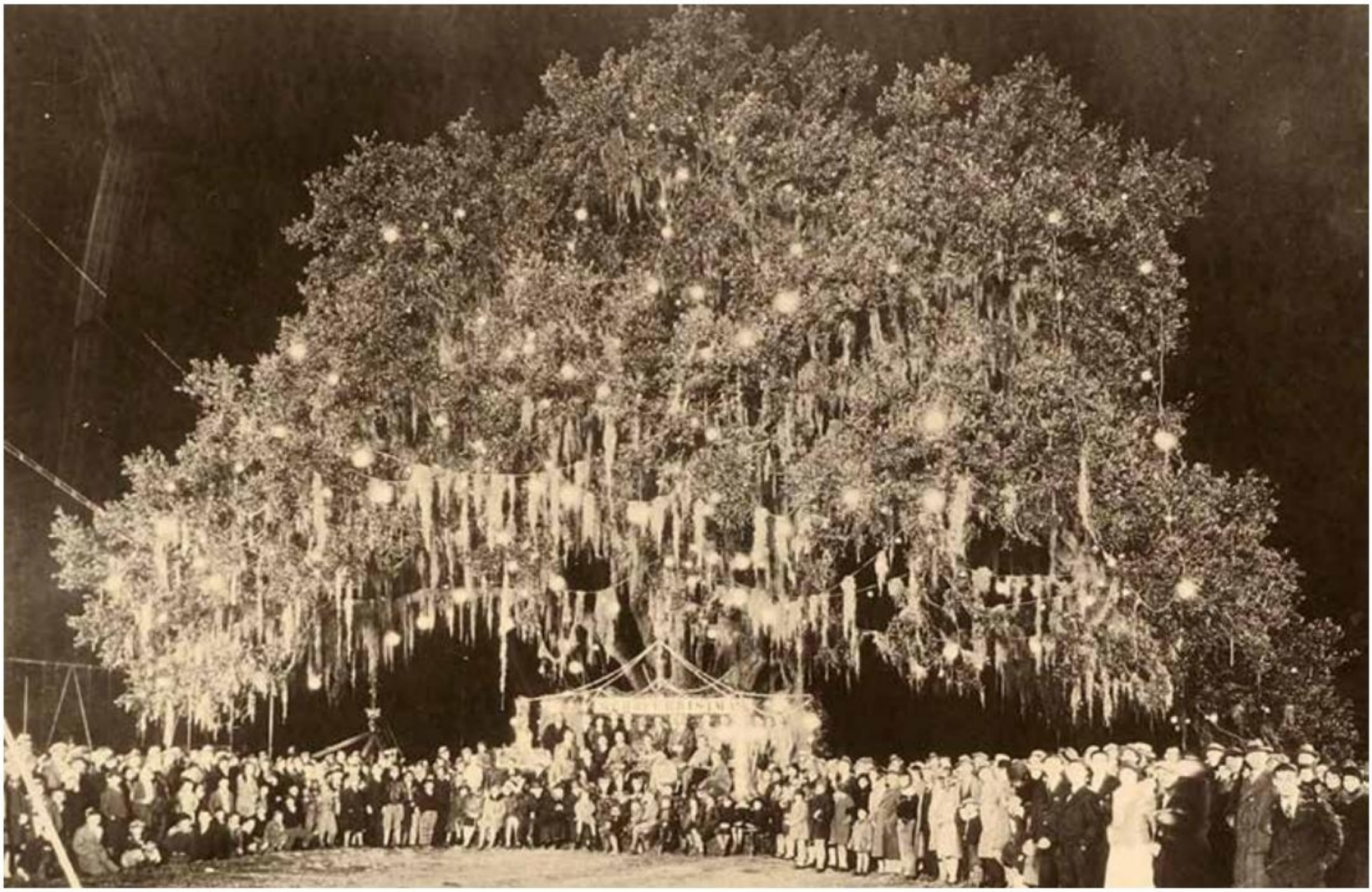
But what I can do
is tell you of a December
afternoon in 1957
when I sat in Miss Cohee's
fourth grade class
listening to the radiators clank
and staring at my scarred desktop
and how Eddie Morgan,
hunched in the seat beside me,
looked up suddenly and whispered,
"It's snowing!"

I looked up too,
along with the rest of the class,
out the tall warped windows,
across the empty playground,
to Idlewild Avenue,
and saw that it was true:
the first gray-white dust just drifting
the blue cedars.

If you are an old believer,
even on this bluest of December days,
I would give you that pale afternoon,
the chalkdust scuffle of shoes
on the worn floor,
those children's faces
eager as light.

– *Stephen E. Smith*

(From *A Short Report on the Fire at Woolworths.*)



COURTESY OF NEW HANOVER COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

The lighting of what was originally called "the living community tree" at Hilton Park in Wilmington, North Carolina, occurred on Christmas Eve night, 1928.

O Christmas Tree!

Once upon a time, historic Hilton Park was a place to be seen – especially beneath the world's largest Christmas tree

By Chris E. Fonvielle Jr.

Neither inclement weather nor sickness among church choir members could dampen the spirits of the revelers who attended the first lighting of "the living community tree" at Hilton Park in Wilmington, North Carolina, on Christmas Eve night, 1928. Some 750 multicolored lightbulbs that adorned the massive live oak glowed and sparkled even more brightly against the dark background of low-hanging clouds and a cold, misty rain. It was pure Christmas magic. "Living Tree of Cheer Lightens Hearts of Many" read the headlines of the *Wilmington Morning Star* the next day. Over the following 81 years, the ritual at Hilton Park of lighting the same old oak tree, which Wilmingtonians boasted was the world's largest living Christmas tree, marked the true beginning of the Christmas season in the city.

The holiday "community affair" was the brainchild of James E. L. "Jimmie" Wade, city commissioner of public works, who later became mayor of Wilmington. He was a jovial, colorful character who usually wore a fine suit and fedora, which he tipped to the ladies, and greeted gentlemen by saying, "Hi, buddy." Until his dying day, he was known about town as "Hi Buddy" Wade.

How the ancient oak tree in Hilton Park was chosen to be the annual symbol of Christmas in Wilmington is an interesting story in itself. In 1927, Commissioner Wade offered a shiny silver dollar to the school boy or girl who found the largest living tree in or near Wilmington, which he proposed to deck out for the holiday. A giant live oak standing more than 75 feet in height, with limbs spreading 110 feet and dripping with Spanish moss, was chosen the winner. Estimated to be at least 300 years old, the tree stood in Hilton Park on a high bluff along the Northeast Cape Fear River near its confluence with Smith's Creek on the northern outskirts of Wilmington.

The site was steeped in history, dating back to the earliest days of the province. In 1728, the British Crown granted to John Gardner Squires 300 acres along Smith's Creek, named for William Smith, another early land grantee in the region. Two years later, Squires sold the tract to John Maultsby, who kept it until 1753. The new owner, William Moore, made vast improvements to the property, in part by building a stately brick "mansion house" within a sprawling grove of live oak trees. He named his plantation Maynard. Following Moore's death, Cornelius Harnett Jr. purchased almost 300 acres from Maultsby's estate between 1753 and 1756.

Cornelius Harnett Jr. is the person most closely associated with Hilton's history. He was a member of a prominent family that was among the first to colonize the Lower Cape Fear. In his younger years Harnett lived in Brunswick Town, the earliest enduring settlement on the Cape Fear River. He eventually relocated, as did most citizens of Brunswick Town, upriver to the more thriving community of Wilmington, which had been incorporated in 1739. Harnett soon became a leading merchant, planter and distiller. The vast wealth he accumulated enabled him to purchase Maynard. It was said that his wife, Mary, grew enough fruits and vegetables in her garden at the plantation to feed the whole population of Wilmington.

Harnett became active in public affairs and was elected to serve on the town's commission and then in the colony's General Assembly. In 1770, Cape Fearians chose him to head the local chapter of the Sons of Liberty. After meeting Harnett at Maynard while traveling south in 1773, Josiah Quincy of Boston described him as the "Samuel Adams of North Carolina." In November of the following year, the Wilmington Committee of Safety elected Harnett chairman, and he emerged as one of the leading patriot figures in the colony during the American Revolution.

Considered a rebel by the British government, Harnett became a target for redcoat forces that captured Wilmington in 1781. They soon arrested and imprisoned him in a roofless blockhouse, where he died from exposure and disease. Harnett was buried in the graveyard at St. James Anglican (now Episcopal) Church underneath a fitting sandstone marker that still stands near the southwest corner of Fourth and Market streets in downtown Wilmington.

In 1784, Harnett's widow sold Maynard to John Hill, brother of William H. Hill, co-executor of the estate. Four years later, John sold the plantation to William, who renamed it Hilton. Hill's inexplicable omission of one "L" from the spelling led some chroniclers to mistakenly believe that the place was named for William Hilton, a Puritan seafarer from Massachusetts Bay Colony who was the first documented European to explore and settle the Lower Cape Fear, between 1662 and 1664.

By 1853, James F. McRee, Jr., a noted Wilmington surgeon,

BALLOU'S PICTORIAL DRAWING-ROOM COMPANION

Hilton's history is most associated with Cornelius Harnett, one of the leading patriots in North Carolina during the American Revolution. His plantation home was called Maynard, but later renamed Hilton.

The world's largest living Christmas tree at Hilton Park in its heyday, as photographed by Hugh Morton about 1950

owned Hilton Plantation. Soon after taking possession, he conveyed a parcel to Oscar G. Parsley, a member of the board of directors for the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, the longest rail line in the world at the time. Parsley built two houses and a steam saw mill at Hilton. During its occupation of Wilmington in the closing days of the Civil War in 1865, Union troops encamped on the grounds of the plantation.

By 1870, Henry Savage had acquired marshlands near Smith's Creek and opened the Hilton Rice Mill. That same year, an enterprising businessman named Christian H. Hussell opened a beer garden at Hilton. The Clarendon Water Works later constructed a reservoir at the site.

In 1884 Wilmingtonians began lobbying city officials to convert Hilton into a community park. "The largest city in the state has no place of resort for her people," one citizen lamented, "and there could not be found a more eligible point than Hilton." It took a while, but in April 1892, the Wilmington Street Railway Company bought 12 acres at Hilton for development as a resort.

The transaction may have been motivated in part by the loss of Cornelius Harnett's 140-year-old mansion. Despite the efforts of the Wilmington Historical and Scientific Society to preserve the historic structure as a "Revolutionary relic," the Peregoy Lumber Company, which had recently purchased the parcel of land on which the house sat, demolished it in March 1892.

The Wilmington Street Railway Company constructed a pleasure ground for picnicking, a field for baseball games and other sporting activities; and a pavilion for music, dancing, and refreshments at Hilton. For a nominal fee, the company carried excursionists by electric trolley out to the park, two miles north of the city's center. Tourists could also travel there by steamboat, including on the *Wilmington,* the *Eleanor,* and the *Little Sam,* from Wilmington's downtown docks.

Hilton Park quickly became the place to be. As early as the summer of 1892, baseball teams played on a "splendid field" enclosed by a wooden fence, church and school groups held "lawn sociables," and families picnicked in the grove of oak trees, while brass bands played open air concerts. Football games, bicycle races, track and field events, gun club matches, fairs, circuses, oyster roasts and military encampments were also regular occurrences on the grounds.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF NANCY S. FONVIELLE

In October 1895, Buffalo Bill Cody brought his Wild West Show, featuring Miss Annie Oakley, the famous dead-eye sharpshooter, to Hilton Park. Wilmington's gentry formed the Cape Fear Golf Club in 1896, and the following spring constructed seven holes for play there. On Thanksgiving Day 1896, a squad of the best local "elevens" was assembled to play the University of North Carolina's football team on Hilton's gridiron. In a unique sporting event at the time, the New Women beat the Old Maid's women's baseball team in a close game at the park in September 1897.

Political rallies were also held at Hilton. On November 8, 1898, Democrats, led by extremists called Red Shirts and Rough Riders, held a "White Man's Rally" at Hilton Park. Two days later they launched the bloody Wilmington Race Riot against black Republicans and their white allies to overthrow the city's legitimately elected government.

Ironically, although social events at Hilton were segregated, African-Americans had also enjoyed the park's facilities up until the Riot of 1898. In one earlier baseball game, Wilmington's black team, Schenk's Black Stockings, had defeated the Red Stockings of New Bern.

For three decades, Hilton Park remained the most popular outdoor venue for cultural, social and political events in southeastern North Carolina. By the early 1920s, however, activities and attendance began to wane. Competition from other places of play — Robert Strange Park at 14th and Market streets, Hugh MacRae Park in the eastern part of New Hanover County, Wrightsville Beach, and Carolina Beach — siphoned a lot of park-goers and events from Hilton.

Perhaps in an effort to restore Hilton Park to its glory days, Commissioner Jimmie Wade promoted the idea of lighting the same oak tree every night during the Christmas season. His efforts were successful, at least for that event. Beginning in 1928, the ceremony became a traditional and must-see affair. Every year, thousands of visitors drove out to Hilton Park to observe the world's largest living Christmas tree.

Although the dates changed from year to year, Hilton's tree was lighted nightly throughout the Yuletide season except for a time during World War II. The tree was said to be more beautiful than ever in 1949. From December 6 until New Year's Eve, it burned brightly with 5,000 lights, while glass ornaments and strands of Spanish moss hung from its stout branches. Reportedly, the grand sight attracted 130,000 people from 41 states and 14 foreign countries in that year alone.

Free nightly programs included the singing of Christmas carols, hymns, spirituals and gospel songs by church choirs, service clubs and school groups, and performances by bands. A reading of Clement Moore's 1823 poem, "A Visit From St. Nicholas," more commonly known today as "'Twas the Night Before Christmas," was also a regular feature. (As an aside, I memorized and recited the poem to children one night during the Christmas season of 1981.)

The most popular attraction for children, of course, was a visit from Santa Claus, often portrayed by "Hi Buddy" Wade, as well as Mrs. Claus. Tiny tots waited eagerly, if impatiently, for their turn to sit on Santa's lap in his makeshift cottage and reveal their Christmas wishes.

By the mid-1980s, the old tree at Hilton Park had seen better days. Severe storms, high winds and the passage of time had cut the tree down to almost half its original height, guy wires supported its now scrawny limbs, and city workers feared for their safety to hang lights and decorations on it at Christmastime.

The last ceremony to light the Christmas tree at Hilton Park occurred in December 2009. The tree is now gone and the site inaccessible to the public.

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The Wilmington Parks and Recreation Department recommended moving the holiday festivities to Riverfront Park along Water Street in the downtown district. Public reaction was fast and furious. "Truth is, it wouldn't matter to me if our tree was reduced to one thin, naked branch with a single refrigerator bulb and a tin-foil star on top," wrote columnist Celia Rivenbark in the *Wilmington Morning Star.* "It's a grand tradition. [Besides], we all get a little shorter and fatter with age, don't we?"

A grass-roots campaign to save Hilton's Christmas tree led to a petition drive in 1986 that garnered some 2,000 signatures and forced the Grinches and "Bah, Humbuggers" to figure out a way to keep the custom of decking it alive. City officials bowed to public sentiment, but neither time nor circumstances waited for the tree and its lovers.

Construction in 2001 of the Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway on Wilmington's north side cut off convenient access to Hilton, and the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centers in New York on September 11 of that year led local authorities to temporarily ban public visitation to the park because of the potential security threat to the Sweeney Water Treatment Plant located on the grounds. As a compromise, the city erected a "holiday tree" at the foot of Market Street, but it was not the same. The Hilton tree was illuminated for the public one last Christmas in 2009, but now it is gone.

The world's largest living Christmas tree at Hilton Park may no longer stand, but many older Wilmingtonians remember it with great fondness. The lighting ceremony kicked off the holiday season in Wilmington for more than eight decades. Kids and adults alike loved it, and many families made it an annual tradition to be part of the experience. It gave them the opportunity to reflect on the year gone by and hope for good things in the year to come. It was pure Christmas magic!

Dr. Fonvielle is a professor emeritus in the Department of History at UNC Wilmington. He is the author of articles and books on the Civil War in North Carolina and the history of the Lower Cape Fear. Upon his retirement in 2018, he was awarded the Order of the Long Leaf Pine in recognition of his distinguished service to the state of North Carolina. The author would like to thank Joe Sheppard of the New Hanover County Public Library, and Nancy Fonvielle for their assistance with this article.

Our Christmas Sing

A tradition that measures the years

By Margaret Maron · Illustrations by Laurel Holden

John thought it was probably the Christmas of 1978.

Scott said, "No, I think it was earlier."

"Maybe 1976?" asked Celeste.

Carlette thought that sounded about right.

After hearing them puzzle over when it all began, I finally went through some of my old journals and found this entry: "First time all five Honeycutts here for dinner since the summer. By candlelight, firelight, and tree lights, we sang carols till midnight."

It was December 23, 1977.

As farm girls growing up amid the tobacco fields of Johnston County, Sue Honeycutt and I had sung in our church choir. I can carry a tune as long as it is pitched no higher than B, but Sue's voice soared like an angel's.

After school and marriage, we were separated first by an ocean and then hundreds of land miles, yet we kept in touch; and once my husband and I moved down to the family farm where I grew up, the friendship became even stronger.

There were eight of us that first Christmas: Sue and her husband, Carl, had two nearly-grown daughters and a teenage son; my husband and I had a 13-year-old boy. That evening together had been so much fun that we did it again the following December.

Do something twice in the South and it immediately becomes a tradition. The first three or four years, our ritual was to sing every seasonal song we could remember, from "Silent Night" to "Silver Bells" to "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus," followed by a sit-down dinner, and ending in an exchange of gifts. We eventually scrapped the gift exchange — boring and too time-consuming. Instead, everyone is

now encouraged to perform a party piece.

This might be a dramatic scene from a school play, an original comic skit with hand puppets, an operatic aria by a granddaughter who has inherited Sue's voice, or a Christmas poem. (I have to be restrained from reading A.A. Milne's "King John's Christmas" every year.) Early on, our sons made us laugh with their take on the classic "Who's On First?" routine. This past year, Sue's 6-year-old great-granddaughter donned a blue shawl and shyly mimed "Mary, Did You Know?" When her father was that age, he came with a stash of Christmas riddles: "What do snowmen eat for breakfast? Frosted Flakes, of course."

Getting measured soon became another part of the tradition. One end of our kitchen wall is thick with dated lines that mark the years. Off come the shoes and everyone who's still growing stands up straight, heels against the baseboard. A granddaughter will proudly announce that she's grown 2 full inches since last year, while her cousin is delighted to see that he's almost as tall as his uncle was when that uncle was 10 years old. Sue and Carl's newest great-grandchild went on the wall this past Christmas. She was only 6 weeks old and her daddy had to straighten out her little frog legs to get an approximate measure.

For several years, as people began to put on coats and hats and look for their car keys, the evening would wind down with a child's whisper, "Is it time to get silly yet?" I would nod and slip her a handful of clothespins, which she quickly shared with equally mischievous cousins. Looking like innocent angels, they maneuvered among their elders, surreptitiously clipping a clothespin on the back of an uncle's shirt, a grandparent's sleeve, the hem of an aunt's skirt. Soon everyone would be laughing and slapping their clothes to find the clothespin, which they immediately transferred to someone else's scarf or hat. More than one clothespin went home on the coattail of an unsuspecting victim.

There are 26 of us now and our sit-down dinner has devolved into little plates of finger foods. The meal still ends with coffee and a Yule log elaborately decorated with meringue mushrooms, but I've passed the recipe on to our older granddaughter.

Some songs are dropped as new ones are added, but we'll never drop "The Twelve Days of Christmas." Everyone joins in on all the words except for the "gift" itself, which becomes a solo or duet, depending on how many people are here. Early on, Carl croaked out "two turtle-doves" in a distinctly tone-deaf baritone, which so cracked us up that he was awarded permanent possession of the second day. With her beautiful voice, Sue was a natural for "five golden rings." The rest of us split up the remaining days in no particular order, although my husband is rather fond of "three French hens."

Carl left us last year and his pitch-perfect son inherited those two turtle-doves. It breaks our hearts to know that this year someone else will have to sing Sue's five golden rings. It will be a bittersweet continuation and more than one pair of eyes will glisten in the candlelight.

But laughter has always been a huge part of our tradition, too. As the first generation of grandchildren matured, their slapstick silliness faded away, but two of Sue and Carl's great-grandchildren are now 10 and 7.

I think it's time to slip them some clothespins.

A native Tar Heel, Margaret Maron has written more than 30 novels and dozens of short stories. She was inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame in 2016.

The Times of His Life

With echoes of O. Henry and Mark Twain, Bob Warwick's stories recall the city he loves and helped shape

By Barbara J. Sullivan

Photograph by Andrew Sherman

You might be having a casual conversation over dinner with longtime Wilmington resident Bob Warwick, and he'll begin to tell you about the baby black bear with a white star on its neck he found while hunting with his dad and his uncle when he was about 8 years old — around 1944 or so. It was down an unpaved, sandy road off Topsail Sound, a road you sometimes had to cross over a stream to get to, back in the day. "He was hung up in a thicket of briars," Warwick says, "and he was hollering 'Mama' just like a child. My uncle said, 'We're not messing with him. His mama's around here somewhere and she won't like it.'" But when they came back to check the next day after church, the bear was still there. "We caught him and put him in the trunk of the car and he hollered 'Mama' all the way home, and when we opened the trunk he ran up a tree in the backyard and I had to go climb the tree and get him."

After a while the bear agreed to take milk from a bottle and settle in to live peacefully alongside the other backyard inhabitants of the Princess Street home: rabbits, chickens and ducks — just down the street from the neighbors' geese and the mule, of course, who helped plow everyone's gardens. During the war, everyone grew his own vegetables; the market produce was reserved for the military.

Listening to this story about a small boy and a bear cub, an entire era begins to work itself into your mind. You can weave in the sounds of neighborhood geese cackling as they recognize their owner's car engine, the smells of clean sheets on laundry day and wet hunting dogs in the fall; you begin to imagine the vast undeveloped stretches of countryside outside Wilmington proper before cars proliferated, when the town boundary was Burnt Mill Creek. You can even imagine the feel of rough tree bark on a boy's skin as he climbed up to retrieve a bear or just to get a view over the neighbors' rooftops. If you listen closely to Bob Warwick you can almost see through the palimpsest that is Wilmington and the old South — to the layers and layers of history that came before.

Few Wilmingtonians today can trace their family roots, on both sides, to the days of the 18th-century colonial South; to a time when statehood for the two Carolinas was less than a decade old and geographical details of the territory were still being mapped, the flora and fauna cataloged, farmsteads being carved out for the first time. Listening to Bob Warwick, you realize that underneath the banality of modern strip malls and interstate highways, the straight lines and well-lit cul-de-sacs of recent subdivisions, lie traces of a completely different way of life, tantalizingly close, asking us to uncover them.

Imagine the first Warwicks leaving the rolling hills of Warwickshire, England, in 1734, to cross the Atlantic and settle in the newly formed colony of North Carolina; setting out on horseback or carriage to survey all the territory from the Lumber River to the ocean — the extensive stretch of land granted to them by King George II. This would have been at a time when Carolina parakeets and red fox were still plentiful, and the woods and pine savannahs looked much as they had for millennia. Around that same time, Warwick's maternal ancestors, the Cayces, were putting down roots in South Carolina, building a homestead on such an excellent hilltop vantage point that it became an important site in the two most epic wars fought on Southern soil. In the Revolutionary War, General Cornwallis's troops blew a cannon hole through the upstairs bedroom wall, after which the general himself chose to claim the house for his headquarters. Less than 100 years later, during the last year of the Civil War, another formidable general, William Tecumseh Sherman, followed suit. In 1865, he set up a command center there, giving him a site close to Columbia, South Carolina, which was ultimately decimated. The Cayces and their neighbors may well have watched as flames burned through that city; they may have seen Sherman's troops ransacking it. Certainly they would have witnessed the rubble and the carnage of war firsthand. At least 46 members of the Cayce, Broughton, Wishert and Warwick families — Warwick's maternal and paternal ancestors — fought on the side of the Confederacy, a fact which in itself, regardless of history's ultimate judgment on the winners and losers, tells us that there is a strain of duty, endurance and perseverance in the family DNA.

Nowhere is that more apparent than in the story of Warwick's father, James Warwick. Born in 1903, one of eight children, he lost his father at age 10. Because this was before the safety net of federal Social Security benefits for widows and children, the family had to cope as best they could. They sent James off each day at the inky, and often cold, hour of 4 a.m. to work at a local dairy. "He worked from 4 in the morning until he went to school," says Warwick, "and then after school until after dark, from age 10 to 13." We can imagine that the child would have been greeted those early mornings by the smells of warm milk,

fresh hay and rotting cow manure, the sounds of clanking milk pails and lowing animals; and he would have watched the sky lighten each day before setting off for a full day of school and more work each evening. After spending three years at this routine, and having completed seventh grade, he set off for the shipyards at Newport News, Virginia, to try his hand at welding. There, amid the blasting heat and crackling staccato of welding machinery, he learned a new trade and rose to the position of gang foreman by the age of 14. Let's pause here to take all this in: a 13-year-old boy working a man's job, building ships the length of two football fields, in a fast-moving, rough, noisy and often unsafe environment — and rising to crew foreman a year later.

What his father did next shaped the young Bob Warwick's life in several ways. First, James Warwick earned a GED and used his extraordinary mathematical skills (he could add an entire page of figures in his head) to become an auditor with the biggest company in Wilmington at the time, the Atlantic Coast Railroad (ACL). And then on the side, decades ahead of his time, he opened his own paper-recycling business.

"Once you graduated, if your father worked for the railroad, you could get a job there," Warwick says. "They paid good wages for a student, so the summer after high school I worked at the railroad." Later that summer, he worked at his father's recycling business. "I drove a truck down Front Street picking up paper, and then I worked in the warehouse bailing." What's most striking about both of these early jobs is the Dickensian mountain of paper he contended with. His work for the recycling business meant driving to pick up truckloads of cardboard, newspapers, IBM punch cards and mixed papers, as well as pressing, wrapping and shifting the paper bales — weighing 1,000 pounds or more apiece — in the un-air-conditioned plant. "It was hot as blue blazes," he says with a smile.

At the ACL, he worked as a match clerk, pairing invoices and receipts, not as clerks do today with filing systems or computer programs, but by wandering through corridors, labyrinths of paper, stacked from floor to ceiling, battalions of paper taking up an entire four-story building and another warehouse a city block long — all packed with the records of the 19th- and 20th-century railroad business. The printed documents, handwritten notes and jottings dated as far back as the Civil War. Where these masses of paper lurked for decades in brick buildings near the Cape Fear River, CFCC college students now study — and at times do so virtually paperless.

Warwick played an important role as a businessman and civic leader as the Port City grew and evolved during the last half of the 20th century and continues to do so into the new millennium. While managing a successful accounting practice, counseling some of Wilmington's wealthiest and most influential families over three generations, he has often worked behind the scenes to support nonprofits in town by connecting them with those who can help financially. He served as president of the chamber of commerce, two terms as chair of the UNCW Board of Trustees, eight years on the University of North Carolina Board of Governors, and was past president and a longtime board member of the YMCA, among many other volunteer activities. In 1972, he cofounded the local chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. And crucially for the development of the city's economy, he worked with prominent businessman Dan Cameron and others to attract new business, including at least three Fortune 500 companies — GE, DuPont and Corning — under the aegis of The Committee of 100, of which he was co-founder and chairman. The group, renamed Wilmington Business Development, continues to bring new business to the city.

In 1968, Warwick witnessed firsthand the devastation caused by the riots following the assassination of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. "My father's business was burned down during the riots," he says. "He was 65 and didn't rebuild it." Three years later, in 1971, when riots broke out again, Warwick took a leading role in calming the waters, calling on his old friend, Meadowlark Lemon, of Harlem Globetrotters fame. The basketball superstar came to town and spoke to students in schools across the city, urging dialogue and nonviolence. "Meadowlark Lemon and I worked one summer together at the paper house," says Warwick. "He was a couple of years ahead in school. His dad, Peanut Lemon, was a really good employee for my dad. I knew Meadowlark, and I called him. He did more to calm down the young people than anyone else."

There are stories from Bob Warwick's life with echoes of Mark Twain or O. Henry, offering us the glimpse of a time that's just slipped out of sight around the corner. "When I was in fifth grade I caught a baby squirrel down in the National Cemetery, brought him home and raised him," Warwick says. "He was a passive squirrel. I could take him to school in my coat pocket. He would sleep unless I took him out. He would sit on my shoulder. His name was Jumpy. We had a latticed back porch. He would get out into the pecan tree and then come back. One day I came home and found him dead in the yard. He'd gotten rat poison or something. That was a bad day."

Which leads us to the story of the corpses Warwick found in the backyard early one morning: a slew of dead chickens, ducks and rabbits, their blood sucked clean out by a weasel. He tells of riding alone as a young child on train cars full of uniformed soldiers heading off to fight the war, of riding his bike to visit the German POWs down at Eighth and Ann Streets and trading nickels and dimes for reichsmarks. Or the time two POWs escaped and stripped off their uniforms on his grandmother's latticed back porch. "She threw them a couple of pairs of pants out the back door and called the police." Then there was riding the trolley to Wrightsville Beach to see the oil tankers burning offshore — torpedoed by German U-boats. "They were close enough you could see them . . . The Germans also put out spies. They found a number of rubber rafts in Wrightsville Beach and what's now called Landfall, where German spies and U-Boats would put them out and they would paddle in and come ashore."

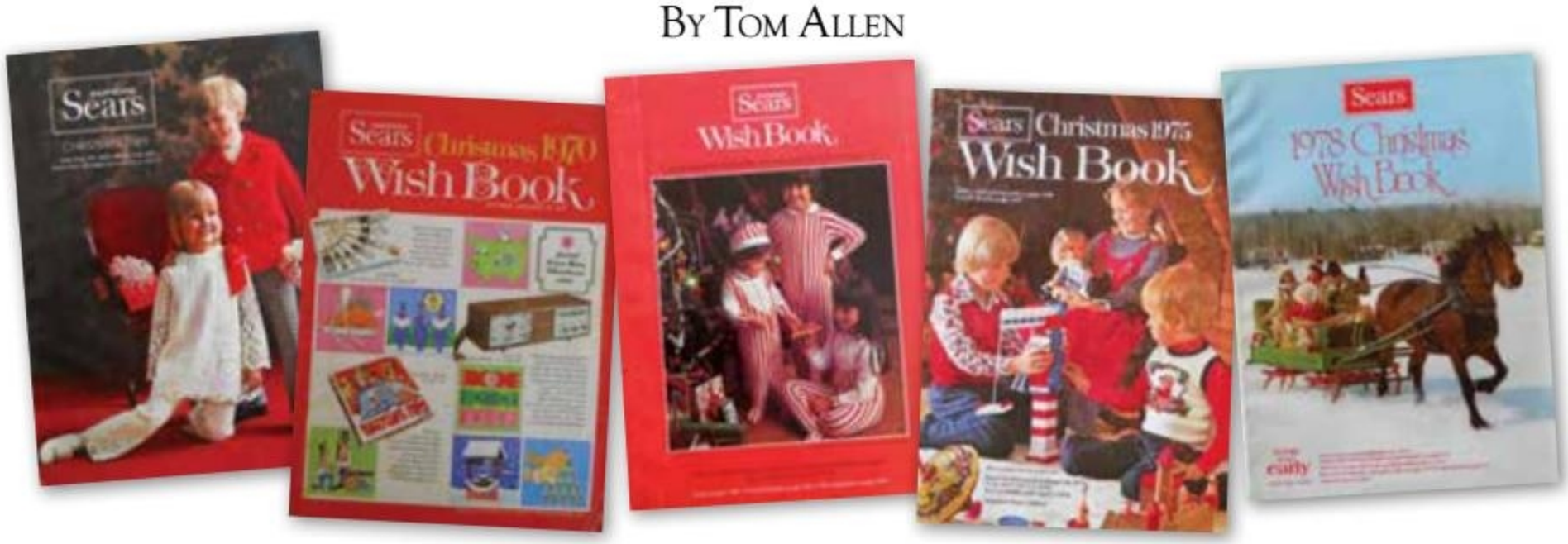
The good news is that Warwick is writing all this down for his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. There's so much to know about what we've lost, how very different life was in years gone by, and what has made Wilmington the prosperous, complex city it is today.

Barbara Sullivan is the author of Garden Perennials for the Coastal South.

Catalog of Memories

No room at the inn for the Wish Book

By Tom Allen



Say it ain't so. Not at the most wonderful time of the year.

Recently, Sears announced they were closing 142 stores before the end of this year. At its height, America's largest retailer boasted over 4,000 stores. Decades of lagging sales and plummeting revenues reduced the number to less than 1,000. Fingers point at everything from out of touch CEOs to blasé brands. I beg to differ. The reason? They messed with the Wish Book.

In 1993, Sears stopped publishing beloved big-book catalogs and reduced the size of the Christmas Wish Book, a holiday tradition since 1933. My generation circled Rock'em Sock'em Robots, Chatty Cathys and Electric Football games with vibrating, metal fields. We showed our parents pictures of Milton Bradley games like Barrel of Monkeys, Mousetrap and Twister. Remember Operation and "Cavity Sam," with his red light bulb nose? Sam's "Adam's Apple" was easy to remove. Likewise his "Wrenched Ankle." Going for the "Bread Basket," worth $1,000 in play money, was the real test of hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills. Touch that metal with those tweezers — the buzzer sounded and Sam's nose lit up. Doggone it! But we loved it. "Batteries Not Included" meant our stockings held an 8-pack of double-A Eveready's. Years later, we'd slip the same 8-pack, along with bubble gum and a pair of socks, into our kid's stockings, just like our parents did. Thanks to the Wish Book, boys might pull out Hot Wheels; girls, Easy Bake Oven accessories.

Eventually, we ditched the Wish Book. Thought we'd outgrown it. Clothes, no longer frowned on, became acceptable under the tree. Who needed a Wish Book, we thought, when slick mail order offerings hollered at us from October until early December. As young adults we circled item numbers from Lands' End catalogs, underlining sizes and colors to make sure whoever filled out the order form or called toll-free would get it right. We had to be at least as preppy as our best friends. We dog-eared pages from L.L. Bean's collection of duck boots and flannel shirts, 'cause if you didn't go for poplin and prep, try rugged and woodsy. For some, toll-free ordering from folksy towns like Dodgeville, Wisconsin, or Rockport, Maine, added to the mystique of the purchase. Am I really talking to someone who lives in Dodgeville? How cool was that?

Then along came the internet. Who needs toll-free numbers and mail order forms when you can shop online? Quick and convenient. Yes, I saved that credit card number, but they always ask for the security code. "Honey, will you hand me my wallet?" Need more choices? Hello Amazon Prime. For 120 bucks a year, get everything from toilet paper to toffee in two business days. But with convenience came overwhelming choices. Clothes shopping? Scroll through page after page of stone-washed denim or polo shirts and you still can't find what you want. Narrow that search. Surely a middle-aged man, with a receding hairline and slight belly bulge, can find an alternative to skinny jeans. All I want is a short-sleeved navy polo — no pockets, hemmed sleeves or, Lord forbid, a monogram. Just a few colors, please. I'm fine not receiving a sweater on Christmas morning in "light beetroot red."

In 1886, Richard Sears, a railroad worker, started selling watches through fliers and mail order catalogs. The business morphed into Sears Roebuck, selling everything from shoes to furniture to musical instruments. You could even buy a house from Sears. Exclusive brands like Kenmore, Craftsman and Diehard proliferated in American kitchens, tool sheds and cars. The Sears Tower, built in 1973 in Chicago, was once the tallest building in the world as well as the retailer's headquarters.

By the 1980s low-price competitors like Walmart, Kmart and Target were opening big box stores. Sears tried to snag the dot-com market, acquired Lands' End to beef up their apparel, and merged with Kmart. Nevertheless, decline continued. Sell-offs increased. The company became a shadow of itself during the '70s and '80s.

Last year, after listening to customers recount Christmas Wish Book memories, Sears brought the catalog back. But the print version, as well as online and mobile editions, failed to attract baby boomers who remember waiting for the iconic Christmas catalog to arrive by mail, months before Santa slid down the chimney.

Everything has its season. Sadly, perhaps Sears has had theirs. Still, memories of finding everything on my Wish Book list under the tree are priceless. Or, at least they beat the necktie with three Wise Men riding camels. I know. It's the thought that counts.

Good luck, Sears. At Christmas, miracles still happen.

Tom Allen is minister of education at First Baptist Church, Southern Pines.

The Gift of Grace

In the storms of life, she reminds us what it means to be human

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY VIRGINIA HOLMAN

When our fox-faced, curly-tailed dog Susie passed away at age 16, I told my husband that I was done: She was the last dog. For a while, my soul was raw and my heart broken, and then, as human hearts so often do, it mended and life continued. Our son had grown and flown and our nest was truly empty, save for the two of us. Our new status was hard-earned and often quite pleasant. Neighboring families who at times seemed to be teetering under twin burdens of their growing human and fur families would sometimes say how much they envied us our freedom. We walked into and out of our home without concern for anything other than each other.

This was quite liberating and enjoyable. For the first time in 30 years, it was just us — no pets, no child. If we decided to have a long dinner with friends after a movie, we weren't worried about rushing home. We could leave town without arranging and paying for a sitter — or even thinking about it. The house was so clean we could go two weeks without vacuuming our floors. Every so often, however, a small tumbleweed of white fur would arrive from some unseen place; I found such moments comforting yet bittersweet, like a paw-wave hello across the cosmic divide.

Then last December, I began visiting dog adoption sites online. My husband knew better than to surprise me with a dog I hadn't met and selected. Dogs are gifts to us in many ways, but we were in agreement that a living creature shouldn't be a holiday present like a scarf or a book. We did think a thoughtful adoption made during the holiday season might be a lovely way to ring in the new year. Even so, I just couldn't commit. When I opened the box of holiday decorations, I put Susie's stocking aside, and felt a bit wistful.

Soon the holidays passed and it was springtime. My husband began folding the paper to the pet page on Saturday mornings. Before long, I was enchanted by the snazzy outfits and adventures of Sunny, Salty, Shorty, Sissy and Sweet Pea, the *Star News*' favorite adopted quinpuplets. I insisted that I wasn't interested in getting another dog. Are you sure? he'd say. On warm spring evenings we'd have a glass of wine on the porch and pass the phone back and forth as we admired various dogs, and debated their merits. Eventually, we found a 2-year-old dog we liked, and someone else adopted her the day before we were to meet. I felt my heart wobble. I wasn't up for this sort of pain. I told him, again, another dog was not meant for me. Then a day later, my husband pointed out a puppy on the same rescue site with an RCA Victor head-tilt and four white paws.

"A puppy's a baby," I said. "Who's going to take care of a puppy?"

Sophisticated reader, you understand (as I did not) that was a rhetorical question. I brought home a little 14-pound rescue puppy we named Gracie. I crated her beside our lumpy guest futon and slept there so I could be available to get her outside when nature called, and so my husband could get a solid eight hours of sleep. (Why ruin sleep for two people? He'd carried plenty of the burden when we had a human baby.) Truly, I didn't mind taking on the night duties; I wanted her to bond with me; I wanted to be her human. Gracie woke five, then three, then two times a night and I'd carry her down two flights of stairs. She'd take care of things and then she'd sit beside me for five minutes or so, enjoying the breeze in her hair. Occasionally, she was distracted by the toads in the dewy grass. One night during our second week together, she stared straight up at the night sky and refused to come inside; it took a while before I understood she was gazing at the moon.

About the same time, we began watching a distant speck on the weather maps that in a week turned into Hurricane Florence.

As it began its inexorable journey toward the coast, we put up our storm shutters, raised items in our garage, packed our clothes, sorted heirlooms (I took the photo albums but left the china) and gathered important documents. We loaded the truck. Then I cleaned the entire house, knowing full well it might be destroyed. Before bed, I watched as my husband and a couple of guys from the neighborhood stood in the driveway and shot the breeze like it was any other night.

That Tuesday afternoon, we headed to Virginia to stay with my brother and sister-in-law. My husband followed us in his car. Gracie was my co-pilot, curled in her puppy crate. The drive to evacuate was slow and stressful. Every time my eyes stung or my heart started to race, Gracie would need something: another treat, a waggle of my fingertips through the crate, a soothing word. Around Goldsboro, we searched for gas, and finally found a station with two working pumps and a long line. While she grumbled and whined in her crate, I sang "Shady Grove" to her until she settled, the same way that I did when our son was a colicky infant.

We were fortunate to have family in Virginia to host us (all of us unaware that we would be stranded in their lovely home for a week and a half as the rivers flooded, roads collapsed, and Wilmington became an island). Once safely evacuated, the long days and nights leading up to the storm were almost as exhausting as the long days and nights after its arrival. I felt both fortunate (our home sustained little damage) and despondent (a few people we knew had lost nearly everything). Soon, the storm had left me adrift emotionally, stuck in a reactive loop to the escalating bad news, and frustrated that we were unable to return home. I grew tired of explaining our situation to people we met who had not followed the disaster or who had no sense of the devastation. "You're still evacuated?" "When will you get back home?" "How bad is it?" In my exhaustion, these kind inquiries grew to feel like vague accusations or disaster rubbernecking. I struggled to maintain a cheerful, or at least polite, composure. I spent several days feeling like I was about a hair's breadth from a full-blown panic attack.

Just when I'd feel overwhelmed, Gracie would lick my hand or whine at the door to be let outside. She needed a walk. She needed to be fed. She needed puppy play time. She was the only thing that soothed me because she needed me so completely and because she was never interested in talking about the storm. When I'd watch too much weather news at night, Gracie would sprawl on the sofa and close her eyes, and I'd rest beside her. She was reminding me of the basics: When you are hungry, eat; when you are tired, sleep. See, human? This is how it's done. I'd stroke her soft ears, turn off the television, and drift off into a dreamless sleep.

We eventually made it home. Life regained a bit more normalcy in October, when the schools reopened. Gracie was our companion, our anchor, through it all: cleaning up, helping folks in need, writing checks to friends who'd lost their homes, supporting groups engaged in the rebuilding of our region, and returning to work.

When I hang our stockings this year, there will be a new one with Gracie's name on it. I'll fill it with things she likes: something that squeaks, something tasty, something to chew. Of course, Gracie is the best gift of all. When I think of the storm, I am grateful for the help we received and the help we were able to offer others. She kept me grounded, reminding me to pace myself, to express gratitude for kindnesses offered, and to sing old songs when I'm overwhelmed. During this season of light, I am grateful for this sweet companion, whose presence is most certainly the gift of grace. She shows me, every day, what it means to be human.

Virginia Holman lives and writes in Carolina Beach.

Bellamy Mansion Museum

Christmas at the Bellamy Mansion

The iconic symbol of Wilmington's past

By William Irvine · Photographs by Rick Ricozzi

The Bellamy Mansion is a stately survivor. Since its completion in 1861 it has endured occupation by Union officers during the Civil War, arsonists' attempts to burn it to the ground in 1972, and most recently the ravages of Hurricane Florence. And yet it remains the crown jewel of domestic architecture in Wilmington, a considerable feat in a city that boasts eight historic districts and more than 6,000 properties on the National Register of Historic Places.

Wilmington in the mid-19th century had seen better days. A series of major fires in 1840, 1843 and 1845 left much of its Colonial past in ruins. But with the newly empty lots came a building boom. "Formerly the town had a rather shabby appearance, and reminded one of a certain Yankee town, in which it was said the people built old homes," reported a Rhode Island journalist in an 1846 Wilmington newspaper. "But it has been almost destroyed by the numerous fires . . . and the buildings erected . . . especially of the last seven years, are of much better character than those that have passed away; and many of them are elegant."

And elegant they were. Wilmington was im-

THE NIGHT before CHRISTMAS
OR A VISIT ST NICHOLAS

porting architects from New York and Philadelphia to design some of the city's most impressive structures. Philadelphian Thomas Walter was hired to build the stunning Gothic Revival St. James Episcopal Church in 1840. Fellow Philadelphia architect Samuel Sloan was working on plans for the First Baptist Church on Market Street. And New York architect John M. Trimble was at work on the neoclassical Thalian Hall, which upon its completion in 1858 was the largest theater south of Richmond.

It was in this heady mix of public projects that Dr. John D. Bellamy envisioned his own house at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Market Street. The scion of a prosperous family in the South Carolina low country and a Secessionist, he came to Wilmington in 1835 to begin his medical training with Dr. William James Harriss, and soon fell in love with his daughter, Eliza, whom he married after his medical training in Philadelphia. By the late 1850s Bellamy was a prosperous Wilmington merchant as well, with two properties out of town — the 10,000-acre Grovely Plantation in Brunswick County, and Grist, a large pine forest in Columbus County, where he ran a successful turpentine distillery. He was also a director of the Bank of Cape Fear and the largest stockholder in the new Wilmington and Weldon Railroad. But after several years in a residence on Dock Street, the family was in need of a large house. The 1860 census reveals that in addition to Eliza and John and their eight children — ages 1 to 19 years old — the household also included nine slaves: a man, three women and five children.

It was the Bellamys' eldest daughter, Belle, who is credited with the design of the mansion's flamboyant colonnade — inspired by a house she saw in Columbia, South Carolina — which she sketched on a napkin for her father, who shared it with the architect-builder James F. Post and his associate Rufus Bunnell. The resulting house is an eclectic combination of Greek Revival, Italianate and Neoclassical styles, a 22-room, four-story frame house on a raised basement topped with a belvedere, which was used

Merry Christmas

Eliza

as a lookout in 1864-65 during the battles at Fort Fisher.

The construction of the house was entirely due to Dr. Bellamy's employment of enslaved craftsmen — brick masons, carpenters and plasterers, as well as several freed black artisans, self-trained skilled workers who created the ornate plaster moldings of the interior and the woodwork throughout the house. Architectural historian Catherine Bishir, the author of the definitive history of the house, *The Bellamy Mansion*, describes the recently finished interiors: "The main rooms glowed with color — flowered carpets in the parlors, mahogany furniture "done up in red silk damask," and at the immense windows, brass cornices, lace curtains and heavy silk draperies of red, green, or gold. White marble and black slate mantels framed the fireplaces, and mirrors in gilded frames reflected the gas light of brass chandeliers. In the wide center hall, the mahogany-railed stair was quieted by a 'beautiful velvet carpet' held in place by silvery rods."

Despite the ravages of Florence — the belvedere roof was partially torn off, sending water cascading through all five floors of the core of the house — the house survives, and will celebrate its 157th Christmas this year. "The site is iconic to Wilmington's past," says Gareth Evans, the Bellamy Mansion's director since 2010. "It has played a role in the Civil War, 1898, and many pivotal moments in regional history. The prominence of its position and appearance makes the mansion a symbol of Wilmington."

William Irvine is the senior editor of Salt.

ALMANAC

December

By Ash Alder

It's been a while since you've come to visit, and when you see her, you gasp.

She looks different. And not just the kind of different one looks from the passing of an ordinary spring, summer and fall.

She has stories.

In the sweeping meadow, the weeping cherry is the axis about which all of life revolves. It's always been this way, at least for as long as you have known her. Which is why you're so shaken to discover the woodpecker drillings along her trunk and branches.

Signs of decay.

As you sit beneath her trunk, comforted by her silhouette in purple twilight, three, four, five white-tailed deer slip through the longleaf veil in the distance. Either they do not see you, or they recognize you as one of their own.

Six deer.

Seven.

You watch them graze in the meadow — just feet away now — and as the last doe brushes past, you exhale a silent prayer.

Grace is here.

You place your hands on the weeping cherry's trunk, honoring this perfect moment, this bare-branched season, the vibrancy among decay.

It's time to go home now. It won't be the same. But there are stories to share. And grace.

Spirit of the Deer

As a child, Christmas Eves were spent at my grandparents' house, where all the cousins hoped to be the first to spot the shiny pickle ornament Papa had hidden in the tree. After evening Mass, then dinner, where soft butter rolls, pumpkin bars and scalloped potatoes were first to vanish from the spread, gifts were exchanged. Whoever found the pickle got theirs first.

And then, the hour drive home.

"Watch for deer," Papa would say before we left.

We always saw them, frozen in the headlights on the roadside.

Three, four, five . . . six deer, seven.

I counted until drifting off to sleep.

Many ancient cultures believe that when an animal crosses your path, its spirit has a special "medicine" for you. The deer is a messenger of gentleness and serenity.

If you happen to see one in the thicket of holiday hustle and bustle, even if it's the one you recall snacking on your hosta and pansies last spring, consider the ways you can bring more grace and kindness to yourself and the world.

Comet and Cupid

According to *National Geographic*'s Top 8 Must-See Sky Events for 2018, the comet eloquently named 46P/Wirtanen will travel past the luminous Pleiades and Hyades star clusters as it makes its closest approach to the Earth on Sunday, Dec. 16 — the comet's brightest-ever predicted passage.

Whether or not you catch the celestial show, don't miss the chance to celebrate the "rebirth of the Sun" on Friday, Dec. 21 — the day before the full cold moon. Call it winter solstice, Yule or midwinter, the longest night of the year is a time for gathering . . . and ritual.

In Japan, it's tradition to take a dip in the yuzu tub, a hot bath filled with floating yellow yuzu fruit, to ward off the common cold.

Not a bad way to welcome winter.

Or around a fire with dearest friends, sharing stories and cider beneath the near-full moon.

The simplicity of winter has a deep moral. The return of Nature, after such a career of splendor and prodigality, to habits so simple and austere, is not lost either upon the head or the heart. It is the philosopher coming back from the banquet and the wine to a cup of water and a crust of bread. – John Burroughs, The Snow-Walkers, 1866

In the Garden this Month

- Rake fallen leaves for compost.
- Plant hardy annuals (snapdragon, petunia, viola).
- Take root cuttings from cold-sensitive perennials and plant them indoors.
- Order fruit trees and grape vines for late-winter planting.
- Dream up, then plan for your spring garden.

Arts Calendar

Dashing Through the Glow 5K Run

12/1

Jingle Belles Holiday Tea

12/2-3

Pearl Harbor USO Dance

12/7

To add a calendar event, please contact calendar@saltmagazinenc.com. Events must be submitted by the first of the month, one month prior to the event.

12/1 Christmas by the Sea Parade
2 p.m. Come join the holiday fun at the Christmas by the Sea Parade in Oak Island. There will be a float decorating contest at 12:30 with prizes awarded. Admission: Free. Oak Island Town Hall, 4601 East Oak Island Drive, Oak Island. For info: (910) 457-6964 or southport-oakisland.com.

12/1 Dashing Through the Glow 5K Run
5 p.m. Start the season with a timed Christmas 5K run and 1K run/walk at RiverLights. Bring a new unwrapped toy for Toys for Tots and get a discount for registration. Take a picture next to the Christmas tree with Santa! Registration: $30-$160. RiverLights, 4410 River Road, Wilmington. More info: its-go-time.com/riverlights-dashing-thru-the-glow/.

12/1 & 2 Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol
8 p.m.; 12/2 at 3 p.m. Big Dawg Productions presents *Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol*. Cape Fear Playhouse, 613 Castle St., Wilmington. For info: (910) 367-5237 or bigdawgproductions.org.

12/1 & 2 Old Wilmington by Candlelight Tour
12/1: 4-8 p.m.; The Lower Cape Fear Historical Society presents the 46th annual Old Wilmington by Candlelight Tour, an evening visit to private residences and churches in the historic district. Refreshments will be served. Saturday, 4-8 p.m.; Sunday, 1-5 p.m. Admission: $40. Latimer House Museum, 126 South Third St., Wilmington. For info: (910)762-0492 or lcfhs.org.

12/1 - 22 Enchanted Airlie
5-7 p.m.; 7-9 p.m. Come take an evening holiday walk through Airlie Gardens, featuring festive lights and holiday displays. Ticket prices are per carload. Admission: $30-$55. Airlie Gardens, 300 Airlie Road, Wilmington. For info: (910) 798-7700 or airliegardens.org,

12/2 Wilmington Women's Half-Marathon
7:30 a.m. This half-marathon for women benefits the Rape Crisis Center of Coastal Horizons Center. Admission: $65-$80. RiverLights, 4410 River Road, Wilmington. For info: its-go-time.com/wilmington-womens-half-marathon/.

12/2 16th Annual Holiday Parade
5 p.m. Come celebrate the festive season downtown at the 16th annual Holiday Parade. Admission: Free. North Front Street and Walnut, Wilmington. For info: (910) 772-4177.

12/2-24 Artisan Holiday Market
10 a.m.- 9 p.m.; Sundays noon - 6 p.m. Going Local NC presents the Artisan Holiday Marketplace. Local artisans with handmade jewelry, sculpture, pottery and clothing. Admission: Free. Mayfaire Town Center, 6935 Conservation Way, Wilmington. For info: (910)769-4833 or goinglocalnc.com.

12/2 & 3 Jingle Belles Holiday Tea
1 p.m.-3 p.m. Come for a tea party to support the Bellamy, featuring tea sandwiches, desserts, and all the trimmings plus raffle tickets and tour of the museum. Admission: $50. Bellamy Mansion Museum, 503 Market St., Wilmington. For info: (910) 251-3700 or bellamymansion.org.

12/4-30 Cape Fear Festival of Trees
The Cape Fear Festival of Trees features holiday trees decorated by more than 50 lo-

Ability Garden Plant Sale

12/15

3 Redneck Tenors

12/19

New Year's Noon

12/31

cal businesses and individual artists. Exhibit included with regular aquarium admission. Admission: $10.95 to $12.95. NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher, 900 Loggerhead Road, Kure Beach. For info: (910) 796-7900 or capefearfestivaloftrees.org.

12/7 Island of Lights Christmas Parade

7:30 p.m. Carolina Beach's annual parade includes holiday floats, music and Santa Claus. Admission: Free. Atlanta Avenue and South Lake Park Blvd., Carolina Beach. For info: (910) 458-5507 or pleasureislandoflights.com.

12/7 Pearl Harbor USO Dance

5:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m. Come dance the night away at the Pearl Harbor USO Dance, including a commemoration ceremony, dance lessons with the Cape Fear Swing Dance Society, and Coco and the Cufflinks' dance music. Admission: $15. Community Arts Center, 120 South 2nd St., Wilmington. For info: (910) 341-7860 or wilmingtoncommunityarts.org.

12/7-9 A Christmas Carol: The Musical

7:30 p.m. Acclaimed actor and historian Tony Rivenbark plays Scrooge in this Thalian Association Community Theatre production. Admission: $32. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. For info: (910) 632-2285 or thalian.org.

12/7-9 A Merry Little Christmas Festival

Friday, 5-8 p.m.; Saturday, noon-8 p.m.; Sunday, noon to 5 p.m.
Poplar Grove Plantation hosts a Merry Little Christmas Festival with a bonfire for marshmallow roasting, arts and crafts vendors, and outdoor movie screenings of holiday favorites. Admission: $5. Poplar Grove Plantation, 10200 US Highway 17 North, Wilmington. For info: (910) 686-9518 or poplargrove.org.

12/8 Christmas Stroll Through the Past

4:30 - 8:30 p.m. Candlelight stroll with visits to the Bellamy Mansion Museum, Burgwin-Wright House, and St. James Episcopal Church as well as period costumes and refreshments. Admission: $10-$20. Various venues downtown. For info: (910) 251-3700 or bellamymansion.org.

12/9 Floating Lantern Ceremony

4 p.m. - 7 p.m. The Cameron Art Museum's Floating Lantern Ceremony lets you make a wish and release candlelit lanterns into the museum's pond. Admission: Free. Cameron Art Museum, 3201 South 17th St., Wilmington. For info: cameronartmuseum.org.

12/13 Wilmington Choral Society Concert

7:30 p.m. The Wilmington Choral Society Center presents "I'm Gonna Sing!" performing "Go Tell It on the Mountain" and "Mary Had a Baby," among other spirituals. Guest soprano Denise Murchison Payton. Admission: $16-$20. Wilson Center, 703 North Third St., Wilmington. For info: (910) 362-7999 or wilmingtonchoralsociety.org.

12/15 Ability Garden Plant Sale

9 a.m.- 12 p.m. This benefit for the Ability Garden at the New Hanover County Arboretum features houseplants, succulents and herbs. Admission: Free. New Hanover County Arboretum, 6206 Oleander Drive, Wilmington. For info: (773) 895-1504 or arboretum.nhcgov.com.

12/15 Island of Lights Tour of Homes

5 p.m. - 9 p.m. Self-guided house tour of Carolina Beach and Kure Beach residences decorated for the holidays. Various locations. For info: (910) 458-5507 or pleasureislandoflights.com.

12/18 The Beach Boys Reason For the Season Concert

7:30 p.m. Mike Love, Bruce Johnston and other members of the legendary band perform in Wilmington as part of their Christmas tour. Admission: $47-$115. Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. For info: (910) 362-7999 or cfcc.edu/capefearstage/beachboys.

12/18 Holiday Pops: A Dickens Christmas

7 p.m. The Wilmington Boys Choir performs favorite Christmas music. Admission: $30. Country Club of Landfall, 1550 Landfall Drive, Wilmington. For tickets: eventbrite.com/e/holiday-pops-a-dickens-christmas-tickets-48224942100 .

12/19 North Carolina Symphony Holiday Pops

7:30 p.m. The symphony performs holiday favorites. There is also an annual sing-along. Admission: $15-$76. Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. For info: (910) 362-7999 or cfcc.edu.

12/19 3 Redneck Tenors

The *America's Got Talent* finalists, who are also classically trained artists, perform gospel, country and Broadway numbers. Admission: $15-$44. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. For tickets and info: (910) 632-2285 or 3redneckтenors.com.

12/20 Vienna Boys Choir

7:30 p.m. The Vienna Boys Choir has been performing for more than 500 years. Come see them perform a selection of sacred music. Admission: $25-$65. Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. For more info and tickets: (910) 362-7999 or tickets@capefearstage.com.

12/20 It's A Wonderful Life

4 p.m. and 7 p.m. Frank Capra's classic Christmas film is a perennial favorite. Admission: $12. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. For more info: (910) 632-2285 or thalianhall.org.

12/29 Carolina Beach State Bank Half Marathon and 5K

8 a.m. Burn off that Christmas turkey at the Carolina Beach State Park Half Marathon and 5K run. Admission: $30-$85. Carolina Beach State Park, 1010 State Park Road, Carolina Beach. For info: its-go-time.com/carolina-beach-park-half-and-5k/.

12/30 Mamma Mia

3 p.m. Opera House Theatre Company presents *Mamma Mia!* at Thalian Hall, a musical with a story told through the songs of ABBA. Admission: $32. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. For more info: operahouse.squarespace.com or (910) 632-2285.

12/31 New Year's Eve Gala

7 p.m. - 1 a.m. Thalian Hall hosts its annual New Year's Eve Gala, featuring dinner and drinks followed by a performance of *Mamma Mia!* After the show, ring in the New Year with a live DJ, dancing and champagne toast. Admission: $165-$200. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. for info and tickets: (910) 632-2285.

12/31 New Year's Noon

9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Admission: $8.75-$9.75. Children's Museum of Wilmington, 116 Orange Street, Wilmington. For info: (910) 254-3534 or playwilmington.org.

WEEKLY HAPPENINGS

Monday

Wrightsville Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Curbside beach market offering a variety of fresh, locally grown produce, baked goods, plants and unique arts and crafts. Seawater Lane, Wrightsville Beach. Info: (910) 256-7925 or www.townofwrightsvillebeach.com.

Tuesday

Wine Tasting

6 p.m. – 8 p.m. Free wine tasting hosted by a wine professional plus small plate specials all night. Admission: Free. The Fortunate Glass, 29 South Front Street, Wilmington. Info: (910) 399-4292 or www.fotunateglass.com.

Cape Fear Blues Jam

8 p.m. A night of live music performed by the area's best Blues musicians. Bring your instrument and join in the fun. Admission: Free. The Rusty Nail, 1310 South Fifth Avenue, Wilmington. Info: (910) 251-1888 or www.capefearblues.org.

Wednesday

Free Wine Tasting at Sweet n Savory Cafe

5 p.m. – 8 p.m. Sample delicious wines for free. Pair them with a meal, dessert, or appetizer and learn more about the wines of the world. Live music starts at 7. Admission: Free. Sweet n Savory Cafe, 1611 Pavilion Place, Wilmington. Info: (910) 256-0115 or www.swetnsavorycafe.com.

Weekly Exhibition Tours

1:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. A weekly tour of the iconic Cameron Arts Museum, featuring presentations about the various exhibits and the selection and installation process. Cameron Arts Museum, 3201 South 17th Street, Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or www.cameronartsmuseum.org.

Ogden Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Local farmers, producers and artisans sell fresh fruits, veggies, plants, eggs, cheese, meat, honey, baked goods, wine, bath products and more. Ogden Park, 615 Ogden Park Drive, Wilmington. Info: (910) 538-6223 or www.wilmingtonandbeaches.com/events-calendar/ogden-farmers-market.

Poplar Grove Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Open-air market held on the front lawn of historic Poplar Grove Plantation offering fresh produce, plants, herbs, baked goods and handmade artisan crafts. Poplar Grove Plantation, 10200 US Highway 17 North, Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or www.poplargrove.org/farmers-market.

Thursday

Wrightsville Beach Brewery Farmers Market

2 p.m. – 6 p.m. Come support local farmers and artisans every Thursday afternoon in the beer garden at the Wrightsville Beach Brewery. Shop for eggs, veggies, meat, honey, and handmade crafts while enjoying one of the Brewery's tasty beers. Stay for live music afterwards. Admission: Free. Wrightsville Beach Brewery, 6201 Oleander Drive, Wilmington. Info: (910) 256-4938 or www.wbbeer.com.

Yoga at the CAM

12–1 p.m. Join in a soothing retreat sure to charge you up while you relax in a beautiful, comfortable setting. Sessions are ongoing and are open to both beginners and experienced participants. Admission: $5–8. Cameron Art Museum, 3201 South 17th Street, Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or www.cameronartmuseum.org.

Friday and Saturday

Cape Fear Museum Little Explorers

10 a.m. Meet your friends in Museum Park for fun, hands-on activities! Enjoy interactive circle time, conduct exciting experiments, and play games related to a weekly theme. Perfect for children ages 3 to 6 and their adult helpers. Admission: Free. Cape Fear Museum, 814 Market Street, Wilmington. Info: (910) 798-4370 or www.capefearmuseum.com.

Blackwater Adventure Tours

Join in an educational guided boat tour from downtown Wilmington to River Bluffs, exploring the mysterious beauty of the Northeast Cape Fear River. See website for schedule. River Bluffs, 1100 Chair Road, Castle Hayne. Info: (910) 623-5015 or www.riverbluffsliving.com.

Saturday

Carolina Beach Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Outdoor "island-style" market featuring live music and local growers, producers and artisans selling fresh local produce, wines meats, baked goods, herbal products and handmade crafts. Carolina Beach Lake Park, Highway 421 & Atlanta Avenue, Carolina Beach. Info: (910) 458-2977 or www.carolinabeachfarmersmarket.com.

Wilmington Farmers Market at Tidal Creek

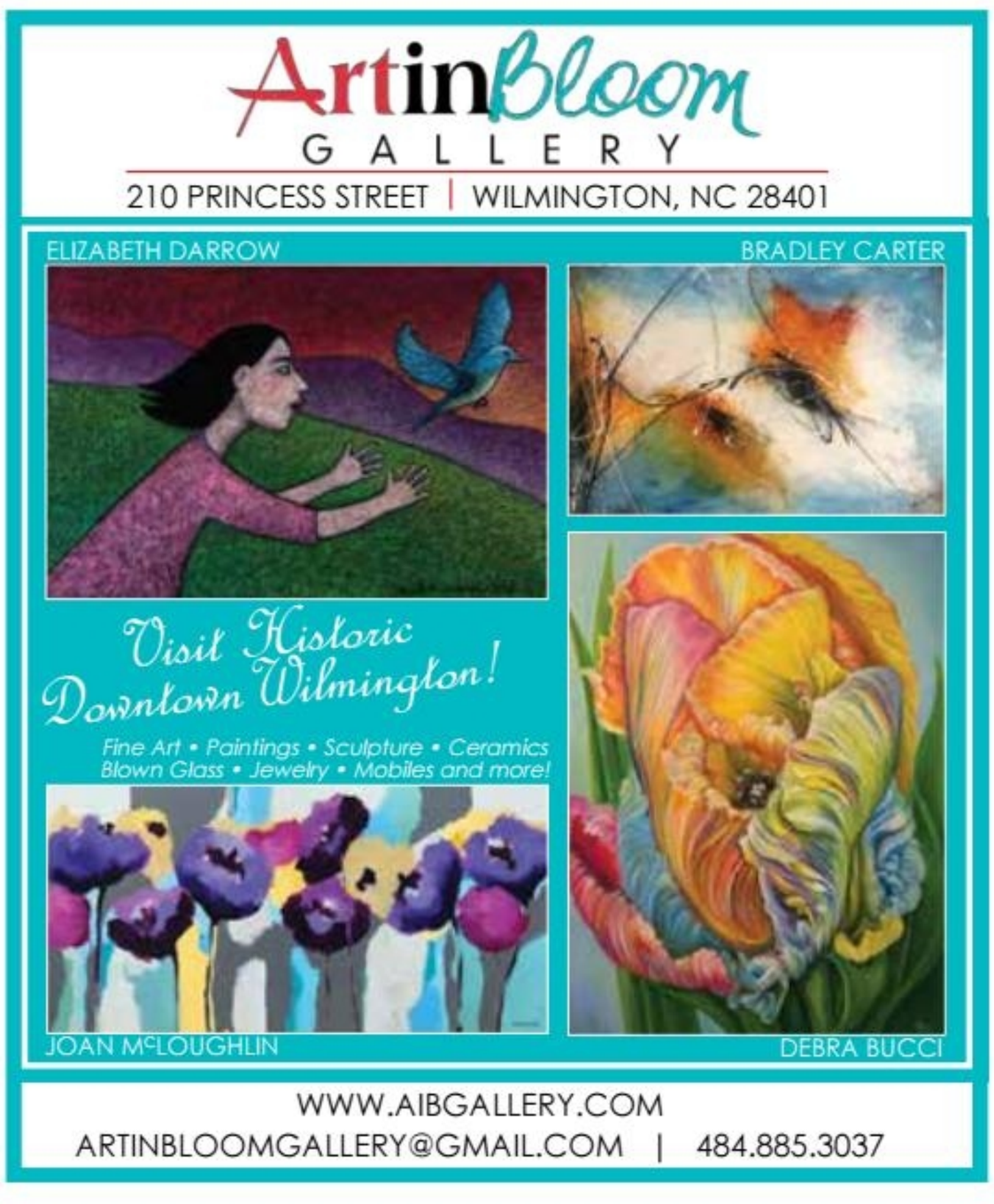
8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Weekly gathering of vetted vendors with fresh produce straight from the farm. Sign up for the weekly newsletter for advanced news of the coming weekend's harvest. 5329 Oleander Drive, Wilmington. For info: thewilmingtonfarmersmarket.com.

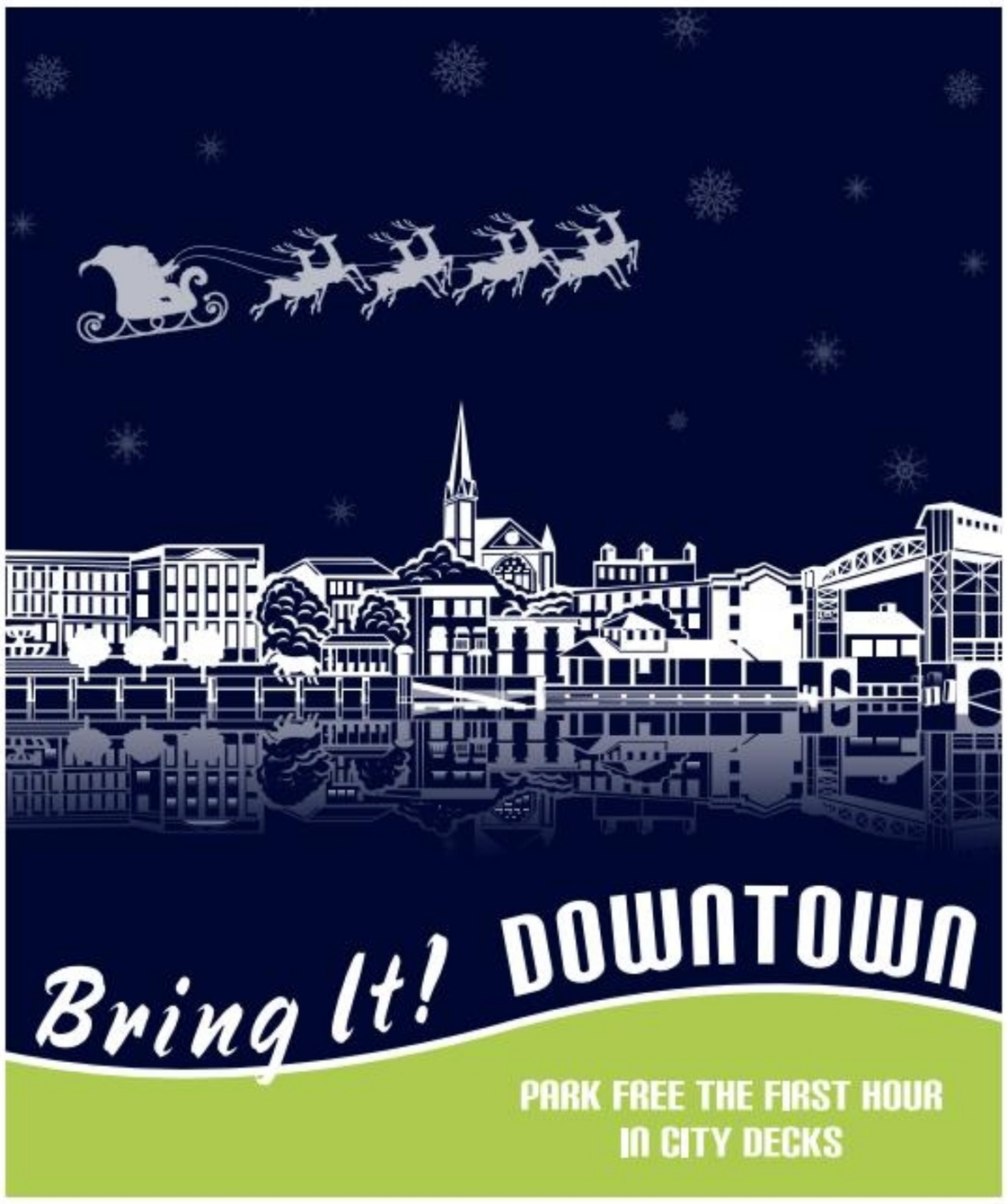
Riverfront Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Curbside market featuring local farmers, producers, artisans, crafters and live music along the banks of the Cape Fear River. Riverfront Park, North Water Street, Wilmington. Info: (910) 538-6223 or www.wilmingtondowntown.com/events/farmers-market.

Taste of Downtown Wilmington

2:15 p.m., 2:45 p.m., & 3:15 p.m. A weekly gourmet food tour by Taste Carolina, featuring some of downtown Wilmington's best restaurants. Each time slot showcases different food. See website for details. Admission: $55–75. Riverwalk at Market Street, Wilmington. Info: (919) 237-2254 or www.tastecarolina.net/wilmington/.

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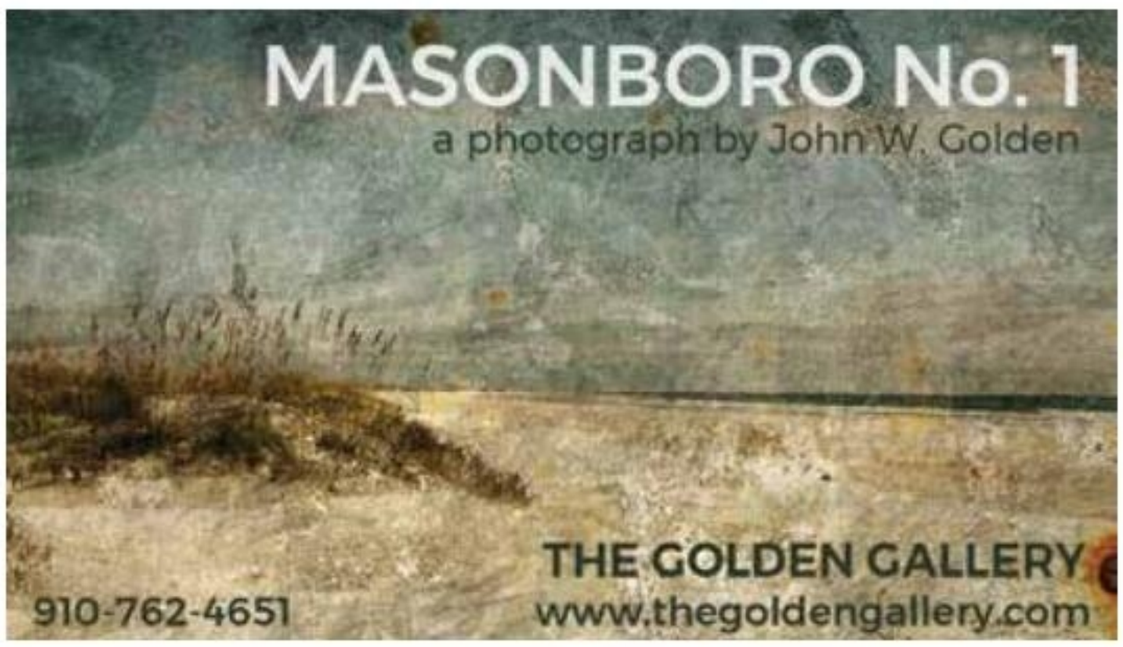
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Port City People

The 4th Annual Toast to Life Gala

Benefit for the Muscular Dystrophy Association of Eastern Carolinas

Friday, October 19, 2018

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Tara Mealer, Jason Revill

Heather McCall, Brian Bost

Courtney Grant, Shabe Bryant

Charla & Lee Webster

Sonya & Alan Perry

Dr. Mesha M. Chadwick, Chandler Allely, Mandy Hill

Jeff Rivenbark, Lauren Lawrence, Vanessa Sosa

Terri & John Lawrence

Anastasia Corp

Tierney Sisk, Ellen Zeman

Tahler Wagner

Holly & Marcus Holsenback

Port City People

Nourish NC's 10th Anniversary Party

At the Coastline Convention Centers

Friday, November 2, 2018

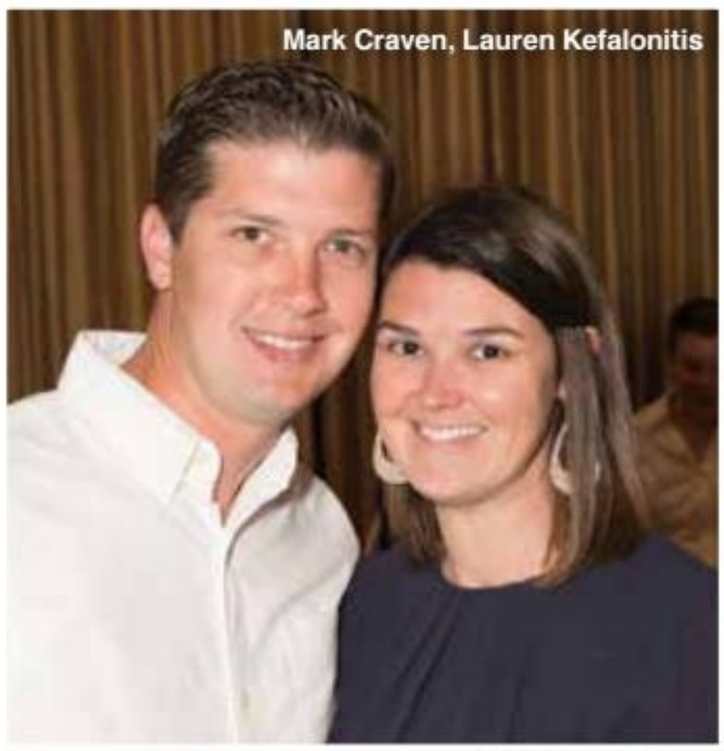
Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Buffy & Tommy Taylor

Julie Schooley, Ray & Anastasia Worrell, Mindy Johnson

May Kendsior, Brandy Alexander

Elaine Weinert, Marvin Siefer


Mark Craven, Lauren Kefalonitis

Beth Hollis, Katelyn Mattox, Kathy Bender

Kathy Raines, Susan Fieldstein

Margaret Stargell

Mike & Caroline Montgomery, Chris Massey, Nina Cockrell

Rob Hollis, Molly McDonough

Jeff Reiniche, Aman Pathak, Eric Kullberg

Barbara & Steve Bucci

Melissa & Neil Brooks

Port City People

Blue Moon Holiday Open House

Blue Moon Gift Shops

Saturday, November 10, 2018

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Linda Bonskowski, Michelle Fry, Emily Scott

Heather & Bennett Rapp

Kim Jefferson

Jeff Hudwak

Ed Mullen

Kerry Morris, Shea Huse, David Morris, Richard Huse

Kathy & Candace Carmichael

Gloria Gilmartin, Alex Alves

Erin & Suzanne Morris

Becky Setliff, Barbara Winstead

Sally Williams, Marsha Zorn

Lynn Olsen, Karen Masterson

Port City People

Willie Stargell Auction, Dinner, & Dance

The Country Club of Landfall

Saturday, November 10, 2018

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Rick & Alison Dunklee

Tom Ryder, Lisa Gilbert, John & Jessica Spencer, Carey & Adam Brown

Grayson & Lauren Blazek

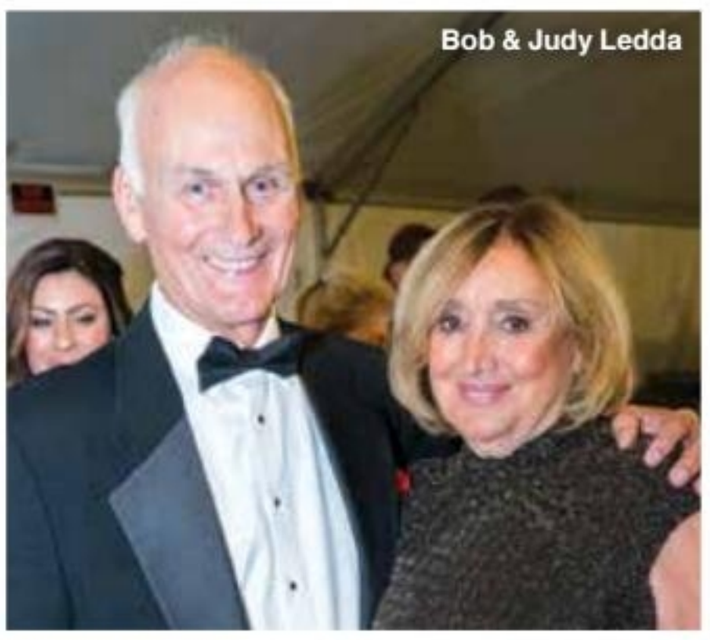
Candice & Erik Horbacz

Sierra Hatcher, Mat Skelly, Suzanne Davis

Delores & Nick Rhodes

Stephen & Alexa Disanaro

Rob & Ginger Reynolds, Mary & Benjamin Vann


Bob & Judy Ledda

Scott & Rachael Schaeffer, Clifton Davis

Jon & Sheila Evans, Jan Kennedy, Pete Weppler

Ryan & Nikky Mantlo

Brilliant and Batty

A cold moon rising ramps things up for the ramped-up December born

By Astrid Stellanova

My Grandpa talked about the Cold Moon, which is what the old-timers used to call the Yule Moon. The Cold Moon falls on December 22, just as Old Man Winter tightens his grip over the Old North State. So, baby, it's going to be a cool Yule. Winter Solstice is just 19 hours earlier, with the full moon sitting just above the horizon in a show we won't forget. What people do forget is how tough it is being a December child and competing with the biggest holiday season of the year. Brilliant or batty, December babies bring it: Ozzy Osbourne is a December baby. Ditto for Samuel L. Jackson and Taylor Swift. Stalin, Sinatra, Spielberg, Walt Disney, Jane Fonda and Pope Francis, too. That's the short list. — Ad Astra, Astrid

Sagittarius (November 22–December 21)
Here you are, Birthday Child, with a bucket list that is slap full of ink. Stop making lists and start making memories. After the holidays, go to what calls you: Graceland or Dollywood. Get a gee-tar. Back talk somebody who scares you. Pick a bone with the smartest one in the room. Be too big for your britches. Don't hold your taters. Have a hissy fit with a tail on it, or get as nekkid as the day you came into this world and take the Polar Bear Challenge. Just don't fiddle fart around, 'cause a birthday reminds us to make the time count before we kick that bucket slap over.

Capricorn (December 22–January 19)
You owe a debt to Saint Nick Nack for your love of the holidays. Sugar, nobody can outdo you at the high altar of tackiness. If there is a corner in the house you haven't put a bow or geegaw on, it wasn't for lack of trying. Sprinkle all the fairy dust you can; in this big old world, more than a few are grateful to you for the smiles.

Aquarius (January 20–February 18)
Sugar, as much as you want to come clean, this ain't the time to air your dirty laundry. Things could get nastier, faster. So make nice, bake something yummy for the neighbors and get into the spirit without taking the cap off the spirits.

Pisces (February 19–March 20)
Yes, you have a taste for the good things in life. But Darling, life in a gated community — like, say, a jail — wouldn't be your cuppa tea. You have got to stop allowing some wild-child impuls es to get the better of you. Take a shine to normal.

Aries (March 21–April 19)
Honey, sometimes you just have to slam the gol dang door! This is that time. You want to believe the best. Someone walked back into your life with sass and attitude. Also, a sense of entitlement. You are being far too kind and generous.

Taurus (April 20–May 20)
You are on the highway to the danger zone, Baby. Yeah, you want to buy the world a Coke and shower it with love, but try reining in your impulse to pull out the wallet. Splash out on kindness, not dollars and you will be more than loved.

Gemini (May 21–June 20)
True, life can suck. True, you seem to have managed to jam a straw right down in it and pulled from the very bottom. Act like you have got some raising, child. What happened has happened. As for the sucky part, what you do with it is up to you.

Cancer (June 21–July 22)
Have fun, but try to be home before zero-dark-thirty. This is no time to be taking chances. Grandpa used to say when you finally get your ducks in a row, first be sure that all of them are yours once you start counting them little tail feathers.

Leo (July 23-August22)
If the saying is true, that there is an ass for every seat, then you are in luck. You have something important in the wings and need everybody that ever waved or winked at you for support. They will be there, Sugar, both gems and asses, too.

Virgo (August 23 – September 22)
A dog may bark, but it is definitely not the same as a hyena. And bluebirds know better than to take up with a buzzard and build a nest. Somebody has already warned you — don't get into the Jell-O punch at the office party and forget that.

Libra (September 23–October 22)
Cuss and fuss if you want to, but you are going to enjoy the holidays a lot more than you expected. Keep your superstitions tamped down and your wet shoes out of the oven. Don't matter what temperature you set them on, shoe leather won't turn into biscuits.

Scorpio (October 23–November 21)
If you drank act-right juice with the same determination you gulped down the Jack Daniels Root Canal Remedy, you might not have to face the long list of people you have ticked off. Make amends. Send some fruit baskets. Like Mama said, try to act right.

For years, Astrid Stellanova owned and operated Curl Up and Dye Beauty Salon in the boondocks of North Carolina until arthritic fingers and her popular astrological readings provoked a new career path.

Holiday Fantasies

Get on board or get out of the way

By Susan S. Kelly

My mother was having a Christmas cull one year and asked if I wanted the toilet lid cover. As one does.

This piece of church bazaar finery was my first claim as a child when the box of decorations came out every Christmas: a forest green, glitter-glued felt oval adorned with a ho-ho-hoing Santa face of pink, white and red felt with sequin eyes, a tufted cotton beard, and a clever drawstring to tighten the cover just so around the commode lid. I thought it was divine. I have it still, the outlined shapes of eyebrows becoming visible as it disintegrates, revealing the crafts-by-numbers kit it originally was. In the attic, Santa's slowly getting de-flocked and de-felted somewhere under the Advent wreath candles that became a waxy purple unicandle during the 100-degree days of August.

The good news about Christmas, besides the obvious Good News, is that tastemakers and arbiters of Tacky are banished, or at the very least, muffled. That's the bad news as well. Everyone is permitted his or her holiday indulgences and eccentricities. Last year my neighbor had an egg-shaped wreath on her door, and I have no idea whether it was accidental or intentional.

Flannery O'Connor famously said of William Faulkner, "Nobody wants his mule and wagon stalled on the same track the Dixie Limited is roaring down." This sentiment applies to Christmas as well. Either get with it, or get mowed over by it. But we can agree on this sentiment: Without women, there would be no Christmas as we know it. Females are out there in the trenches, responsible for every holiday fantasy promulgated in mags and ads — caroling, cookies, gingerbread houses, the works. "I see more of the Salvation Army ringers than I do my husband," a friend once remarked to me. Another friend drew the line in the sand, er, carpet. "I shopped, wrapped, mailed, decorated, planned, cooked, cleaned and organized," she told her husband and two sons. "You guys have to take down the tree." They took down the tree all right. They took it down at Easter. Another friend buys herself an additional piece of her Christmas china every time her ex-husband mentions his new wife's name in her presence. I suspect she's on finger bowls by now.

As for that gingerbread house fantasy, here's what I have to say about doing that with your children: Go for the pre-fab kits. I actually made gingerbread from scratch, spread it thinly on parchment-paper-lined baking trays, then cut it into wall shapes. Like many activities, it was cuter in the planning than the execution, never mind unappreciated. I'm still digging peppermint candy slivers out of the kitchen heating vents. Instead, keep an illustrated Hansel and Gretel book, complete with candy-covered fantasy gingerbread house, on the coffee table along with 'Twas the Night Before Christmas. Point out what really happens to bad little boys and girls, not getting switches in stockings.

I don't understand the Fairness Doctrine of today, when couples routinely alternate Christmas between families. I get Christmas Eve, you get Christmas morning, they get Christmas Day dinner . . . logistics alone are on a par with the Normandy invasion, not to mention the emotions, prompting my next-door neighbor to wryly refer to the comings, goings and schedules as "the prisoner exchange." To counter this trend, I had a third child after two boys — fully aware that the baby would likely be another boy — just to increase the odds that someone, someone, would come home to me at Christmas. Still, the in-laws have a powerful draw, in part because my sister-in-law concocts eggnog with five kinds of liquor, which she totes around during the holidays in a wheeled cooler. I don't mean that the cooler holds containers of eggnog. I mean that the cooler actually holds the eggnog itself, sloshing around. Open the lid, and enticing clumps of a substance I'm afraid to ask about — Ice cream? Whipped cream? Egg whites? Butter? — float whitely on the surface. Five kinds of liquor soften, not to mention blur, the blow of absent family. And it was my mother-in-law who taught me the value of smilax at Christmas. I wrap the supple stems all through my (so-called) chandelier, and suspend papier-mâché angels from that green and leafy heaven. Ivy will not do that for you. I've also nurtured two smilax shrubs for years, for no other reason than to use their bright berries at Christmas, and have concluded I have two males or gender-neutral plants. Whatever their sexual preferences, they aren't producing and I'm still using fake red berries.

Still, if I haven't been able to fulfill every Christmas fantasy, I've managed to produce a few of the Christmas food fantasies out there. Clove-studded oranges: Check. Apples dipped in egg whites, then coated with granulated sugar so they appear to glisten: Check. On my friend Ginny's birthdays, her mother would hand her some cash and say, "Run uptown and buy yourself a bathing suit for your birthday." It's not surprising, then, that Ginny's ongoing fantasy for her own daughter was that she'd dash downstairs on Christmas morning, see wall-to-wall presents, and fall over in a dead faint at Santa's largesse. If this is your fantasy, point your compass toward the North Pole of IKEA. Last I checked, a cloth tepee that covers 10 square feet of living room space was $5.99. Same for the fabric playhouse you drape over a card table. Never mind their two-hour shelf life; they come in desert browns and beiges, and jungle browns and greens. Because nothing says Christmas like camo.

Susan Kelly is a blithe spirit, author of several novels, and proud grandmother.

ILLUSTRATION BY MERIDITH MARTENS

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When he isn't showing homes to a prospective buyer, you might find Randy surf fishing on Lea Island or kicking up clams way up in the marsh. He is an old Raleigh boy who attended ECU and kept heading east. He thinks he landed in the right place. His clients think so, too.

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